

# THE LONDON READER

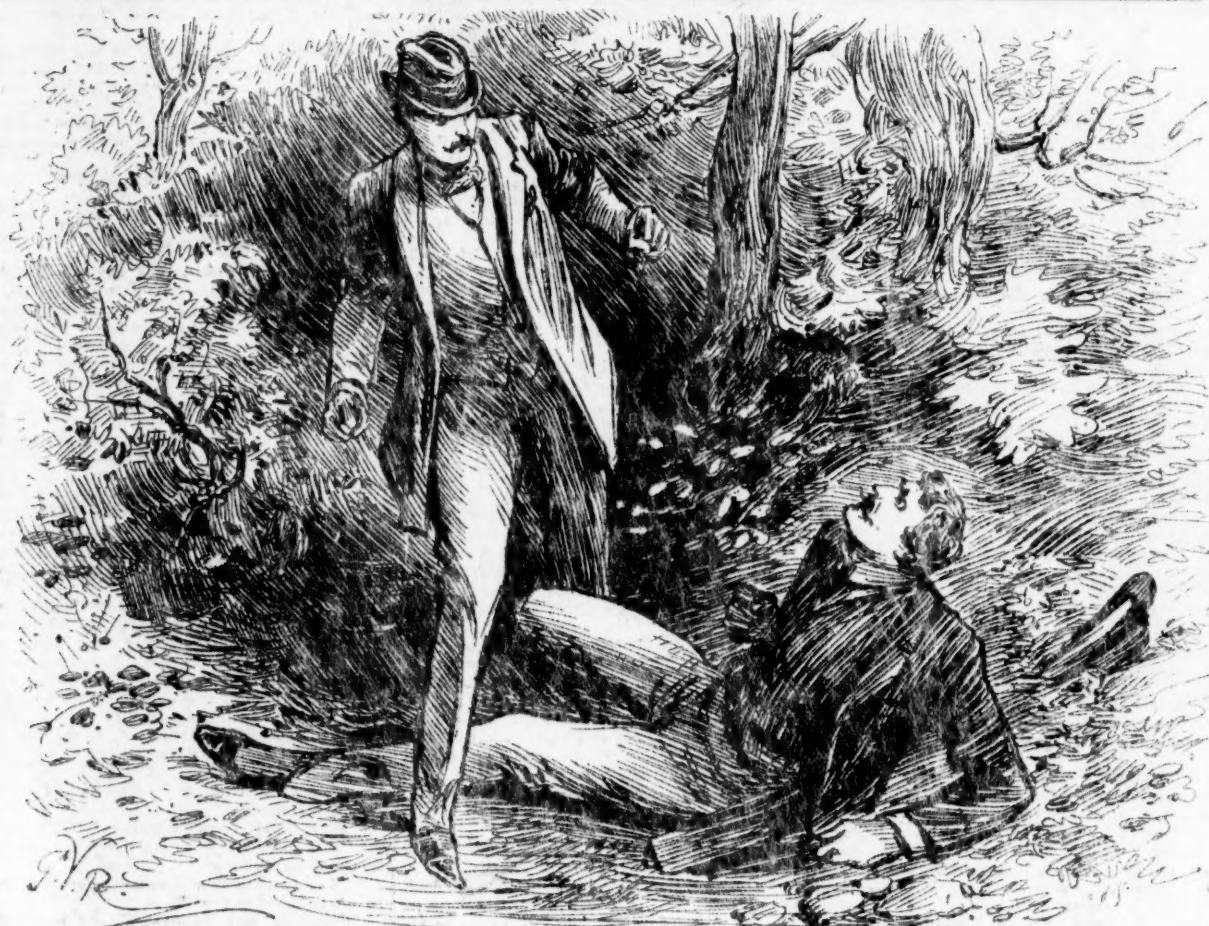
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"FOR DOG!" FELIX CRIED, AS WITH A CRASH SIR FRANCIS FELL TO THE GROUND.

## FALSE OF FAITH.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

"I NEVER was so troubled in my life," said Mrs. Roswell, pressing her handkerchief to her red eyes. "I left town quite a fortnight earlier than I intended, and sent Lavender off with the Glovers, because I saw that he was growing fond of her, and I did not wish the marriage. Now I learn he contrived to get an invite from our friends, and further ingratiate himself with my child—to-day she has written me that he has proposed for her hand, and she has given it—to-morrow she returns, and he follows by a later train."

"Well," answered Mrs. Greaves, her confidante and friend, "I cannot see any objection to the alliance. On the contrary, I consider Lavender a very enviable girl. Here are two men, both young, both equally favoured by fortune, the one gifted with beauty and owning a title—both

madly in love with Lavender. Perhaps the title gives the precedence to Sir Francis."

"But dear Lucy, I am not a mercenary mother, and I am sure a title would not weigh with Lavender; that is what makes it all the worse, because, to accept Francis Allardyce she must love him, and to love him must mean misery."

"Oh nonsense! For the life of me I cannot understand your prejudice against him; he is witty, accomplished, as handsome as a picture—well-born, wealthy. Surely you are a trifle unreasonable; if he has been a little wild—why, are not all young men of fortune so? and marriage with such a dear girl as Lavender will steady him."

Mrs. Roswell shook her head dubiously.

"I said I was not a mercenary woman, now I add that I am not a harsh one. I cannot explain why I distrust Sir Francis, but the fact remains that I do—I do not mean his love for my child; that is real enough, because beyond her beauty, at my death she will have nothing but a poor hundred pounds a year. Although it would be a wrench to part with her to any man, I should not mind if it were Felix Ray to whom I gave

her. We have known him all our lives, and despite the fact that you call him 'my ugly duckling' I know that his heart is one of gold; with him she would have been happy—and I should not utterly have lost her."

"Neither will you if she marries Sir Francis; his estate joins Mr. Ray's, the difference in distance from here to the Mead, and Ray's Croft Lodge, is infinitesimal. Really, Patty, you are making mountains out of mole-hills; but, of course, if you disapprove the marriage you have only to forbid it—Lavender would not disobey you; she is a loving daughter."

"I know, but she is not like most girls and would find it so very hard to forget; I could not bear to see her unhappy."

"Of course not," briskly, "neither can you well keep the young people apart, when Sir Francis returns; you might take the child abroad."

"That would do no good; nothing but the knowledge of her lover's unworthiness would ever make her unfaithful to her promise; so I must endure as best I may, and she must 'dree her weird.'"

"Well Patty, I should be glad if one of my

girls stood in her shoes, and I cannot—really cannot understand your dislike of Sir Francis. Take my word for it, there is nothing in store for Lavender but good luck; and now I must really go, the Major is such a martinet for punctuality. Goodbye, dear; meet Lavender as she would wish to be met, and be as kind as you can to that lover of hers. As for Felix Ray I don't pity him very much; the Beast has no right to love the Beauty, and he is so extremely matter of fact that he will not fret himself ill over her loss, although he has known and loved her from his boyhood."

Mrs. Roswell smiled faintly, but she did not look very happy or resigned when her friend had left her; Lavender was all she had left to love, and she loved her better than her life.

They lived in a quiet place known as Honeyhill, in a pretty cottage surrounded by pleasant, though not large, gardens.

The Roswells were not rich people, although the mother had in addition to a life annuity, a snug little pension allowed by Government to her in recognition of her husband's services abroad; but Lavender would have very little to call her own when she lost her mother; and sometimes Mrs. Roswell fancied that her race was nearly run.

No one accounted her delicate; her ailments never lasted longer than two or three days at a stretch, and although of frequent occurrence seemed of no vital importance save to the widow herself and the daughter who loved her.

Their nearest neighbour was Mr. Felix Ray, a young fellow of excellent birth and means, so that most of the ladies of the county were apt to forget his lack of good looks.

Felix was most distinctly not handsome; he had a grave face, with a broad brow, overhanging temples; deep, kindly honest eyes, although they were so far set under the shaggy brows that it was difficult for one to discern their colour—they were dark grey and beautiful in shade and shape—only none but his intimates could tell this.

He did not shine in society, although he was not a fool; indeed competent judges said he was just the reverse, but that he was too shy and reticent to air his talents, or to find small talk easy.

It was the poor who knew him best, and after their kind they did not always speak well of him, because, for all his generosity and kindness, Felix could on occasion be very stern.

It was curious that both these men, Ray and Allardyce, should have been born on the same day of the same year, that each should have been early orphaned, that each should be rather more than well supplied with money, and that each should be suited for the hand of Lavender Roswell.

Of Francis Allardyce little was known after he attained his majority (he was now twenty-six), he had left Oxford without taking a degree, and gone abroad, never troubling himself to correspond with the county people, to whom he had become almost mythical, when suddenly they heard of his return, of his handsome style of living—the season was in full swing and he had gone to town—then they laughingly shrugged their shoulders declaring he was very mysterious, but then the Allardyses were not like other folks.

There had been "Handsome Allardyce, Wicked Allardyce," but never a "Stay-at-home, or good Allardyce," in the recollection of men.

So without knowing him they condemned him, and when rumour said he was Lavender Roswell's favoured suitor, all the wise ones shook their heads, opining she would be foolish to prefer him to Felix Ray, who had loved her since she was first promoted to long frocks—and perhaps long before.

Now Felix was home graver and more importunate than ever; but it was whispered he had suffered a sore disappointment, and was less inclined for society than before.

Mrs. Roswell, thinking all these things over, sighed again and yet again.

"If only it had been Felix!" but when the

time for Lavender's arrival drew near, she, dressing with exquisite care, went to meet her darling, and perhaps only the almost convulsive embrace told the daughter how much the mother was moved.

Few words passed between them through the homeward drive; but when Lavender had retired to her room for the night, Mrs. Roswell, unable to rest, went to her.

There was infinite tenderness in the gesture with which she drew the girl to her.

"My dear one! my dear one! is this for your happiness? Think well, for after marriage there is no help for woman, no hope if he to whom she gives herself is unworthy—and you have known him so short a time."

"Mother, darling, I love him," answered Lavender, hiding her flushed face upon her mother's breast. "And better still, I trust him."

"Then, dear, I have no more to say; only, Lavender, I am very anxious for my ewe lamb."

"Forget to be anxious, dear mamma; remember only to be glad. I am a happy girl, and Francis will teach you quickly to love him for his own sake."

"I hope so, dear, I hope so! Good-night, and God have you in His keeping." Kissing her child she returned to her own room, but not to sleep; all night long she tossed to and fro, and always the burden of her plaint was: "If it had but been Felix."

But in the morning Lavender was so glad, so radiant, that she could not bear even in thought to shadow her happiness, so put on her holiday mood and when Sir Francis arrived for the all-important interview, received him with a grace and kindness for which he was unprepared—for she had never treated him in friendly fashion before.

He was a handsome young fellow; most people looking at the rivals would have declared Allardyce "the proper man" to marry Lavender; his dark Velasquez style contrasted so splendidly with her pale, yellow hair and deep violet eyes, her pure complexion, and almost childishly pretty face.

But when she had given her consent, and permitted him to go in search of her daughter, Mrs. Roswell covered her face with her hands and silently wept.

Sir Francis found his sweetheart in the garden; hearing his step she turned quickly, and because she loved him so dearly, because deceit was so abhorrent to her, she stretched out her little hands to him, saying softly,—

"Oh, Francis, you have seen mamma! Is she not as kind as she is lovely?"

But he, taking her boldly into his arms, answered,—

"That she was kind I know, but I could think of no other beauty but yours, my Lavender. Kiss me; do you realise that you belong to me now. You are all mine; nothing but death can part us—Lavender! Lavender!"

She locked her hands about his neck.

"Nothing but death," she said dreamily, "it is a solemn thought, Francis—but I like to feel that it is true—that nothing indeed can separate us."

He kissed the sweet innocent lips again and yet again.

"You love me so much, my darling! There is nothing that could turn your heart from me! Neither misfortune nor folly—neither age nor change."

"We shall grow old together, and our hearts will be drawn nearer each other with each waning year; oh, no! I cannot doubt you, I do not doubt myself—only deceit could chill my affection, only your own falsehood could make me see you with other eyes."

He held her back the better to look into her blushing, pretty face.

"And deceit you would not forgive; even if it belonged to the past in which you had no part; and which was sorely repented?"

"I do not say that," thoughtfully; "a man may sin and repent, through repentance rising to nobler things. I was thinking only of a deliberate deceit practised daily and hourly towards oneself—of a divided devotion—and that I would neither endure nor forgive," and the sweet voice had a proud ring.

"You make me quite the happiest of men," laughed Francis, "because no other woman could ever tempt me from my allegiance," and he looked so handsome, so honest as he spoke, that she could not refuse the kiss he begged.

Presently she said,—

"Now you must let me make you acquainted with our small kingdom; I dare say you have forgotten all about it—it is so many years since you went away. How queer it is to think we did not even know each other until three months ago."

"If I had guessed what a treasure Clare Cottage held, I had been back in Honeyhill ages ago."

"That will do, sir; I want to hear no more flattery. Come, let me show you the goat and the puppies; then there are my gold fish and canaries to be inspected."

As with his arm about her he went with her, one man looking over the laurel hedge groaned to his heavy heart,—

"Lost! Lost! Oh, my God, lost!"

## CHAPTER II.

DUTY the engagement was announced, and Lavender being a favourite, it gave general satisfaction; only those who knew Felix and were aware of his hopes, wondered how he would receive the news. He gave no sign of any pain he might suffer, talked quietly of it to any who broached the subject of the betrothal, so that one young fellow was heard to declare,—

"He is a deuced sight too quiet over it; if I were Allardyce I should be on my guard against him; those still fellows are always dangerous."

To Lavender there was something indescribably distressing in the knowledge that she had hurt her loyal friend, and she looked forward to their first meeting with something very like dread. But Felix robbed it of all sense of constraint, all unpleasantness; with a gentle pressure of the slender hand he said,—

"They tell me, Lavender, that you are to be married, so I came up to wish you all the joy that you can desire for yourself. I hope that you will be very, very happy, dear," and the eyes meeting hers were very kindly; there was no change in the gentle friendliness of his tone, so with a sense of relief she thanked him for his good wishes, deciding in her heart, as she stole a glance at the strong face, that he had not suffered much.

"And when is it to be, Lavender? The wedding, I mean."

"Oh, not until next March, I shall be nineteen then, and mamma says that is quite young enough for me to marry."

"Of course Allardyce does not agree to that; he would like it earlier!"

"Francis is very impatient," she answered, with a charming smile and blush, "really the little spell of waiting will be salutary for him."

Thus they met, parting presently as friends, apparently on the same old footing.

"I am so glad, mamma, that you were mistaken," said Lavender, thoughtfully, "and that my vanity led me astray; Felix does not mind one little bit."

"Still waters run deep, my dear, and he is not one to wear his heart on his sleeve; but if it makes you happy to believe this, why believe it, for, Lavender, I would not have one cloud upon your sky, one shadow on your young life."

To Felix Mrs. Roswell had said,—

"I am unfeignedly grieved for you; you are well aware that your wish was mine, but I could not oppose my child, and Allardyce loves her very dearly—in time you may forget."

"I shall not forget," answered the quiet voice, "but if Sir Francis can make her happier than I had hoped to do, I shall be more than content."

So the days lengthened into weeks, the weeks into months, and Lavender lived in a lovely dream; there could be no more generous or devoted lover than Sir Francis, and even Mrs. Roswell (whilst regretting her favourite's disappointment) was forced to confess he left nothing to be desired; she even began to entertain something like affection for him.



Really it would have been strange had she not done so, for his manner towards her was deferential and uniformly kind.

"I have nothing left to desire," Lavender would say to him at odd times; "now that you and mamma are such good friends I count myself the most fortunate of all girls, and wonder what I have done to deserve so many good things—not *deserve*! I hardly expressed myself rightly then—for how could I merit them! So I should be all the more grateful that they are given me so freely," and he would laughingly bid her not to have too humble an opinion of herself; that he would not flatter her with complimentary answers to her innocent questions.

And now the summer was gone, the autumn too had flown at the first breath of winter, and a new year dawned dully on the world. It was quite early in January, and Francis as he kissed Lavender good-night, had bidden her be ready for a drive into Downley (the neighbouring town) at three precisely the following afternoon.

"I saw an antique bracelet in old Sadd's curiosity shop," he said, "it is more curious than beautiful, but the workmanship is exquisite. I would like your opinion upon it, Lavender; your mother has a liking for such things, and it being her birthday next week, I thought I would secure it, if you approve it."

"You are very good and thoughtful," the girl answered, her violet eyes aglow with love and gratitude, "mamma will be so delighted. Good-night, dear Francis, you shall find me a very miricle of punctuality."

The next day dawned bright and clear, the air was slightly frosty, and the high wind of the previous night had left the roads in an excellent condition.

"It will be a most enjoyable drive," said Lavender, coming down fully equipped, "and we shall be home by four-thirty, mamma, so you will not be long alone."

She chatted gaily as she buttoned her gloves, looking from time to time out upon the road beyond the garden; but there was not yet any sign of Francis although the hall clock had chimed three some minutes ago.

"He is late," remarked Mrs. Rosavel, "what a miricle!"

"Something unforeseen has detained him; some particular business," the girl said, equably. "You know the other night that prosy old steward of his kept him from us, and how vexed he was to break his promise. Oh!" with a little happy laugh, "you and I know, mamma, nothing but necessity would keep him from my side. Is it not good to be so well loved?"

But though she waited dressed until four, neither Francis nor any message arrived; Lavender was not anxious; after dinner her lover would walk up and explain. If anything serious had occurred she would have been acquainted with it, so with a little sigh of disappointment, she sprang up.

"Well, mamma, it seems useless to wait any longer, so I will go over to the vicarage and inquire after baby's cold; if Francis comes he will know where to find me—I leave you to scold him."

"But it is growing late," began her mother dubiously, "it is so early dark now."

"I shall not be longer than half-an-hour; I will take the short cut through Raycroft Wood, and I promise not to stay longer than it takes to make the inquiry."

Mrs. Rosavel made no further demur, and Lavender set out alone; it was but a very short walk to the Vicarage, and remembering her promise she did not enter.

"I shall come up for a glorious gossip to-morrow morning," she said, as she bade the clergyman's young wife good-bye, "remember to look after me for me."

Then she began to walk briskly home; the light was fast fading in the wood, but Lavender was not nervous; then, too, she liked this quiet way where often she walked with Francis, and where now she could think of him uninterrupted. Suddenly she heard a voice, it was a woman's, and sounded full of coquetry; then two figures came in sight—she could see them but faintly yet, for a white, faint mist was

rising—but the man was tall, and he had an arm about the girl's waist.

Smiling to herself Lavender retreated behind some bushes. "A lover and his law," she thought, "how stupid they would feel if they met me, and knew I had witnessed their endearments."

So she stood aside until they should pass, leaving her free to resume her journey. Distinctly she heard the woman say,—

"Oh, rubbish; you profess to be fond of me, but you like *her* best."

The voice was unrecited, but the answering one was evidently a gentleman's.

"Now, Jenny! how can you be so frightfully unjust? If I liked her best, should I not be with her now? Answer me that!"

Whose voice was it? Why did Lavender's heart beat so madly! why did she lean so eagerly, fearfully forward, careless now whether they saw her or not.

"Oh," laughed the woman, "you dare not let her see you with me or even confess you know me; I am not quite so silly as to believe that."

"Now, Jenny! this is distinctly unfair. Twice I have neglected my duty—all for you—you little witch; and this is how you reward me."

There was no ring of truth or passion in his tones, but the unhappy listener shivered; she could not stir from the spot. Suddenly the moon rose above a bank of clouds, piercing through the faint mist it showed those two faces with horrible distinctness.

"Look here, Jenny," said the man, "you must be for hurrying home now, or that big brother of yours will be asking awkward questions. To-morrow or the next day you shall have the earrings upon which your little heart is set. Now kiss me good-bye; we must not be seen together."

As their lips met, Lavender with one supreme effort tore herself away, and ran like a wild thing through the fallen leaves and crackling twigs—for the man was Francis.

"What was that?" he asked hurriedly.

"Oh, nothing," retorted his companion, "only a stoat, or something like that; how easily frightened you are! Good-bye, and don't forget your promise."

They parted then, each going in an opposite direction, whilst Lavender pursued her way in mad haste until she reached Clare Cottage. Outside the gate she paused,—

"Oh, how can I go in! How can I tell her," she moaned. "I was so sure of his faith, and so proud of his love. His love that is shared with such a girl as Jenny Burns! Francis! Francis! you should have spared me—what shall I do? what shall I do?"

She leaned her head upon the gate, but she did not weep; she was thinking of the bitter truth she had learned all too late; wondering in her heart how she should make it known to her mother, and with what words she should send her lover away.

Presently she began to walk round the grounds—hardly knowing what she did, not conscious of the fleeting time, or of anything save that awful ache in her heart born of despised love, and broken faith. Many times she paused the gate, but she could not force herself to enter; only when the hour was late, and her steps returned to it, she heard some one calling "Lavender! Lavender!" and the next instant felt her mother's hand upon her arm.

"Oh, child, how you have frightened me! Where have you been?"

"To a funeral," she answered in an unnatural tone, "the burial of my own love and joy." Without a word Mrs. Rosavel drew her gently to the house, into the dainty, warm drawing-room; then she turned to look at her. Her face was white, her eyes stony, but from them looked forth a great horror, a vast despair. It seemed she could not speak; so the mother, drawing her down on the couch beside her, said in a voice which she vainly tried to make steady,—

"Lavender, tell me all—you must; I entreat you—I command you. Is it Francis? What has happened to him? He is not hurt—or dead?"

Then suddenly the storm broke, with a sob

that was almost a shriek, Lavender hid her face on her mother's breast.

"Oh, my heart! my heart!" then brokenly with many interruptions she told the bitter tale; whilst the mother's gentle spirit rose in hot anger against the man who could deal her child such a blow. And yet how could she see her suffer?

"Lavender," she said at last, "he cannot love that girl, he was only amusing himself with her; he would not make her his wife. What will you do?"

Suddenly the girl stood erect, her slim hands clasped before her. "He may not love her, neither does he me, or he would never do me such dishonour. I cannot trust him any more, and what is love without trust? I am not a revengeful woman, but I am a proud one, and I will not endure such ignominy at any man's hands. It is most cruel now; what would it be when we were married! Oh no, no, to-morrow, though it break my heart, I shall say good-bye to him for ever—oh! mother, mother, to be the rival of such a girl—if she had been good or prudent, it had not been so hard—my heart! my heart! it will burst with its weight of woe."

### CHAPTER III.

In the morning came Sir Francis. Lavender had begged that she might see him alone, and to this request the anxious mother had finally acceded. With a smile on his lips and the love-light in his eyes, Allardyce stretched out his hand to the girl. To his surprise she would not take it, and when he looked into her face he guessed something of the truth. He had never seen her proud or stern before, she was both now.

"You are angry with me," he said, gaily, "and it was shameful to break my appointment; but you will forgive me when I tell you old Bunnett wanted me."

The colour leapt her pale cheeks.

"Do not lay the blame to your steward's door, it was not he who kept you from me but Jenny Burns. Hush! do not disgrace yourself further by lying to me, Sir Francis, I will not hear you."

How much or how little she knew he could not guess, and so he put a bold face upon the matter.

"Well, Lavender, I was certainly wrong; but if you would listen to me you would see how foolish you are to be jealous of Jenny without cause."

"I'm jealous of her! No, Francis, at least in that you are mistaken. But I have just cause for anger. I both saw and heard you in Raycroft Wood."

He started and had the grace to blush.

"Oh, I behaved like a brute; but there are so many excuses for men. You see I met Jenny just prior to the time for coming here; and she—well she is a little gipsy—she twitted me with fear of your displeasure should I dare not to keep my word."

"Oh, stay!" cried Lavender, her eyes flashing, "every word you utter only aggravates your offence. You must be on singularly familiar terms with this girl when she dares to tease you about me. At least I should not have entered into your conversation—you should have spared me that degradation. I cannot forgive you; and so let us say goodbye!"

"What nonsense, Lavender; I was only amusing myself with Jenny."

"Only amusing yourself! What guarantee have I that you have not also made sport of me?"

"I'll swear that I love you and you only. Are you not to be my wife? And after all, Lavender, you should not be quite so hard upon my little peccadilloes. I never professed to be a Joseph, or even a Felix Ray. Kiss me and be friends again."

"No. Do you remember something I said to you that morning when mamma had given consent to our engagement? 'Only deities could chill my affection; only your own falsehood could make me see you with other eyes.' I did not

“speak lightly, you have deceived and dishonoured me for the sake of Jenny Burns. If she is good enough to love she is good enough to wed; and your attentions, unless you mean them, can only hurt her.”

“Oh, put Jenny out of the question altogether,” he said, savagely, “she is very well able to take care of herself, the artful little hussy! We won’t quarrel about her, sweetheart;” and then he tried to put his arm round her, but she shrank back.

“We will not quarrel, but we must part.”  
“It is your mother who has made you so bitter, she was always Ray’s ally.”

“You mistake; believing it to be for my happiness, she has even pleaded for you; but it would not make me happy to call myself your wife; because I never could trust you, having once proved you false.”

“I won’t accept my *compé*,” he cried, for, indeed, of all the loves of his life he held Lavender most dear; “to-morrow, when you are not quite so angry, we will talk together again. And I will promise anything that you in reason demand. But, sweetheart, no man shall wrest you from me. If you will not marry me then no other shall call you wife. *I will kill you first!* I never knew you unforgetting, unkind, before. I won’t believe that you can change thus in a day. Little darling, I have offended, and I am sorry, what more can I say? Forget and forgive!”

“I have loved you so well,” she answered, wearily, “that it is easy to forgive; but forgetfulness is another matter.”

He was growing angry. She had no right to be so severe about such a trifling matter, so he said, humbly,—

“Well, let it be as you please; only I do not consider myself a free man. I shall give you time for thought. If in the morning, you wish to see me, you will kindly acquaint me with your wish. If I hear nothing I shall know that our rupture is more serious than I now believe, and the county will be regaled with a pretty piece of scandal.”

Without another word he left her, and went savagely homewards, taking especial care to avoid the ways Miss Jenny Burns most frequented.

He was angry with Lavender, most angry with Jenny; and yet, as he compared the two girls he laughed derisively to think the former should be jealous of the latter. Lavender’s beauty would but increase with passing years, whilst Jenny, fair enough now, would become coarse and even ugly.

She had a short crop of bright brown hair, full hazel eyes, a red and white complexion, and good teeth.

But she was even now more than inclined to *embourgeoiser*, and not all the tight-lacing in the world would give her that slenderness she so desired.

Then her name had been the subject of village gossip, so that Francis said, savagely to himself,—“Lavender must be mad to think I would make her my wife; but it is just as well that she should lose some of her straight-faced notions. I won’t go up to the Cottage to-morrow. I’ll run down to Eastbourne for a week, and give my little lady time for reflection. Oh! she will welcome me back with open arms.”

In the morning he was especially careful that Lavender should know of his departure, and she, poor child, tormented herself all that day with the thoughts,—

“Have I been too rash? Does he really love me? Ought I to forgive?”

Her gentle heart was softening to him. She hated the deceit, but she had loved the deceiver dearly. Should she give ear to his entreaties, and receive him again? And yet how could she trust him? And without trust what was love but a torment?

Mrs. Rosavel did not attempt to advise her, so dear was her child’s happiness to her that she feared lest she might mar it.

And whilst Lavender hesitated between principle and a wish to forgive, Mrs. Greaves called at Clare Cottage. For once she was glad not to find her favourite present for she had news to tell that would be painful to the girl.

“Where is Lavender?” she said, as she sank into the easiest of chairs.

“In her room,” answered Mrs. Rosavel with a sigh; “she is not very well, and just now likes best to be alone.”

Mrs. Greaves looked shrewdly at her.

“Does that mean she and Sir Francis have quarrelled?”

“I am afraid I must say, yes; but, until matters are settled, I prefer to keep the whole affair a secret. You will not forget this, Lucy!”

“Not I. It is over the Downley Theatre case, of course, that they have disagreed.”

“You are talking Greek to me, Lucy; please explain.”

“Then you don’t know! And I dare say I shall not be thanked for my pains. But really I have small patience with friends who wait until the mischief is done before they speak, and then say ‘I could have told you all this before.’ Patty, it is best you and Lavender should know the truth. You were right and I wrong when we discussed Sir Francis. My boys went last last Thursday to see the pantomime at Downley, and Sir Francis was there with Jenny Burns.”

“Oh!” For a moment Mrs. Rosavel could say no more; then she murmured, “that was the night he disappointed us; the next day he said that Mr. Bunnett had detained him on some troublesome business. What shall I say to Lavender?”

“You need say nothing, mamma,” said a quiet voice from the doorway, “I have heard all;” and then, with set lips and white face, she went slowly away, the mother crying,—

“Oh, Lucy, it will break her heart—my poor child!”

But Mrs. Greaves stayed her when she would have followed, saying,—

“Let her alone, it is better so; and Lavender is too proud to wear the willow for such a man’s sake. Of course, there will be a great deal of speculation over their rupture, perhaps a little scandal; but Lavender’s name will not suffer. The Allardyses have never had too good a reputation,”—and much more she added in the same strain, only her friend would not be comforted because of her darling’s sufferings.

No sooner had the door closed upon Mrs. Greaves than she ran up to Lavender’s room; the girl was sitting dry-eyed and calm before her window.

“Come down, darling,” said her mother, “it is so cold up here; and, oh, Lavender, do not take this so much to heart.”

She rose, and with her hands loosely clasped before her, said,—

“I am not grieving overmuch”—but the poor, pale lips quivered, the eyes grew dark with pain—“only the blow was so sudden. In time I shall grow used to it—I shall even learn to forget. Why are you crying, mamma? I feel as though I never could shed another tear. Once again I am your Lavender—only yours; and we will be happy together.”

“Don’t, my dear one! If you would only sob or get angry with him, I should not be so much afraid; I should even hope you would learn to forget him.”

“I shall never forget him,” the girl answered, “because, you see, once I loved him so very dearly. I thought he was not like other men, ~~but~~ I have learned my mistake; one may forgive and even pity the creature one has adored, but it is impossible to love what one despises.”

The mother clung about and fondled her.

“You speak now in anger; have you thought what your life will be when he has gone out of it for ever?”

“Yes; but do not you plead his cause, mother dear. I shall suffer, but not always; I should suffer infinitely more as his wife; because he would never make me any vow I could believe; he would never be absent from me but I should be tortured by doubts of him, and so—and so—he shall belong to a past which you and I together will try to forget. It is better so—oh, much better, though it is hard.”

It was not anger or resentment, that prompted Lavender’s decision. She was incapable of cherishing a bitter feeling against anyone, above all against Sir Francis. But loyal as she was herself,

treachery was abhorrent and unnatural to her, her love could not long survive it, and so, with a pang, she resolved that her parting with her lover should be final.

At the close of the week he returned to Honeyhill, by no means anxious or depressed, for he had had a very gay time at Eastbourne, and he estimated his own charms too highly to believe any girl in her sober senses could be blind to them.

He sent a note to Clare Cottage, in which he said,—

“And now that you have had ample time to repent you of your harshness, and (I hope) to miss me a little, you will send me a line to comfort me, and to bring me to your feet once more. I am quite certain that my little sweetheart is incapable of nourishing malice against her erring, but most devoted lover,—FRANCIS.”

Lavender crushed the note in her hand.

“He assumes too much,” she said to herself, “we cannot return to the old footing. I learned to know him all too late, and he can never undo the past, or satisfy me any more.” So she answered him briefly and simply, as her heart dictated. “All is over between us. I beg you not to seek an interview with me, no good, but only pain can result from it. I loved you once—not now; for falsehood is the death of love. I am not angry, although I am hurt; but we shall each outlive our pain, and I beg you to have no harsh thoughts against me, who will always desire your happiness and welfare.—LAVENDER.”

He cast the note to the ground and, with a curse, set his heel upon it.

“It is her turn now,” he said, “but mine will come. She is weary of me and would set me aside for Ray, but he shall never have her, I will murder her first!”

And in this hour, when he knew himself despised and rejected, he loved her infinitely more than in the first days of his passion.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Of course the broken engagement was the talk of the county, more especially as the wedding-day had been so near; equally, of course, sympathy was divided. Nobody really knew the truth of the matter, but most of the people attributed it to the theatre episode, many of them saying, “Young men will be young men, and that they had no idea Lavender could be so unforgiving.”

The girl herself was covered with shame, scarcely daring to go abroad, and shrinking from all inquiries concerning her health, stoicly, and, seeing this, Mrs. Rosavel determined to take her away until the first bitterness of her pain had passed. They went to Nice, remaining there until the date fixed for the wedding had passed; and when they returned to Honeyhill the roses once more bloomed in Lavender’s cheeks, although the love which once made glad her heart was dead, buried, out of sight, but never out of mind. Then Felix visited them; he was very kind, very gentle, never referring to the past, never breathing of the hope he cherished; but seeing that he loved her still, Mrs. Rosavel trusted that her darling might yet be made happy. Once, when Lavender walked through the village, she met Jenny Burns; the girl looked at her insolently, and, tossing her head, passed by with a triumphant smile. Gentle as she was, Lavender could not feel angry, especially when Jenny, running back, accosted her with the words, “Miss Rosavel, Sir Francis is coming home to-morrow; haven’t you any message for him? I am most likely to see him first, you know.”

The colour mounted faintly to Lavender’s cheeks.

“I have no message,” she said, quietly; “even if I had, you are scarcely the messenger I should choose, Jane Burns;” and she went her way, leaving the girl scowling at her retreating figure.

“She don’t think me good enough to look at,” she thought; “yet there’s no telling but I shall be my lady when she’s only an old maid; it ain’t



likely Mr. Ray will wait for ever for her, and she isn't so beautiful that she can go on for ever picking and choosing."

Lavender was a little shaken by this interview, which perhaps she showed, for Felix, meeting her, said,—

"What has happened, Lavender? Do you want help?"

"Oh, nothing very unpleasant has occurred; but I have grown morbidly sensitive of late, and little things vex me; do not trouble about me."

He looked wistfully at her, the whole character of his firm, plain face changing.

"Anything that grieves you," he answered, "distresses me. If only you would trust me a little more, how glad I should be; if only you would let me be your helper, your friend—"

And as he paused, his eyes meeting hers, she answered, hurriedly,—

"I have never doubted your friendship, Felix; I am glad to know that still remains to me."

Well, that was just how matters stood when Sir Francis returned to Honeyhill; and Jenny was not slow to acquaint him with his rival's frequent visits to Clare Cottage. Now that, through her, he and Lavender were parted, he hated her, and she got small thanks for her news. Of course, man-like, he laid all the blame upon her shoulders, and she, being of a quarrelsome nature, responded in like manner, until he shouted,—

"Do you forget what you are? That I can cast you and your precious brother adrift at an instant's notice! And by Heaven I'll do it, if you so much as dare to accost me or breathe Miss Rosavel's name again!"

He turned on his heel then, the girl watching him with angry, resentful eyes.

"I'm not fit to take her name on my lips, ain't I?" she muttered. "I am never to speak to you again. Oh, very well! I shall be careful to remember, and I'll pay off old scores, if I can; there isn't any doubt about that."

It was in vain Sir Francis sought an interview with Lavender; he called at the cottage several times, but always he was met with the words, "The ladies are not at home;" and although he knew this to be false, and tried to bribe the neat maid to admit him, he could not succeed. He was furious; should so mere a girl as Lavender defy him? Why, he had never laid siege in vain to a woman's heart. If he could only see her his cause would be won. And then he thought of Felix, and cursed him.

"Mrs. Rosavel always gave him the preference," he muttered; "she is evidently trying to force Lavender into his arms; but by Heaven he shall not have her."

Such was his mood as he waited for his rival to issue from Clare Cottage one bright but bleak April day; and Felix seemed in no hurry to take his leave. Sir Francis had wandered as far as Rye-croft Wood before he heard his quick, sharp tread. Wheeling round he confronted him suddenly, and, when Felix would have passed with a chill recognition, he said, hoarsely,—

"One word with you: you have just left Lavender."

"Presuming that I have, what then?" Ray answered, stolidly.

"This: that no man shall rob me of what is mine by prior right. You and Mrs. Rosavel between you are fanning her anger against me daily into fiercer flame. Long ago she would have relented but for you."

"You will excuse me for giving you the lie," said Felix, very coolly. "It is not always well to measure other men by your own standard."

"What the d—! do you mean, you cowardly traitorous hound?"

"To leave you to your own society; I do not find it congenial. Stand aside."

White with fury Sir Francis sprang upon him; but Felix, though not so agile as he, was stronger, and contemptuously thrust him back.

"I should like to know what is your complaint against me."

"There is no need to speak of that; you know it. You are deliberately trying to wean Miss Rosavel's affections from me."

"Look here, Allardyce: it is just as well you should hear the truth at once. Long before you

came upon the scene I hoped to make Lavender my wife; and now that you are discarded I consider that I am free to woo her, as she is free to accept me if she will."

"Do you think she could give you affection after all the past?"

"You remind me of the hero of Locksley Hall; his conceit was phenomenal—you perhaps will understand what I mean when I recall the words to you,—

"Is it well to wish thee happy, having known me, to decline  
On a range of lower feelings, and a narrower heart  
than mine?"

at least I may promise Miss Rosavel a whole-hearted devotion, and a name untarnished; and I shall win her if I can."

Sir Francis was furious; a countryman passing heard his voice raised in anger, recognised the two men and shrugging his shoulders went his way.

With utmost violence, the baronet flung himself upon his rival, and now Felix who was always slow to anger, felt the lust of blood within him.

Like most placable men, when once roused he was hard to pacify, and he hurled Sir Francis back with a violence of which he was scarcely conscious.

"You dog!" he cried, and as with a crash he fell to the ground, he stood over him much like St. George of the dragon memory.

The countryman looking back saw them thus, but plodded on his way, unconscious that there were other witnesses to the scene.

It was no affair of his, and if gentlemen liked to "fall out" over a woman, well that was their own business, only, remembering the slatternly, shrewish wife at home, he rather condemned them for fools.

The day closed in; in the wood it was growing dusk although the little crescent moon had risen, and the stars were coming out one by one.

At The Moat the servants grumbled loudly over the master's prolonged absence; the dinner would be spoiled (cook's temper certainly was) and Sir Francis was not a man to take into consideration the fact that it had been put back an hour.

It grew later; quite in the dead of the night four men carried Sir Francis home, and to all appearance he was dead.

The doctor was summoned in hot haste, and a cursory examination showed that he had been wounded by a pistol shot.

"Not dead," said the medical man, "but it is very doubtful if he survive his injury—the bullet must be extracted at once—sad he should have been undiscovered so long—the hemorrhage has continued some hours, otherwise he would not be so terribly exhausted."

The next day all the county was apprised of the catastrophe which had befallen Sir Francis, and many were the conjectures concerning it.

He lying unconscious, half dead upon his bed; folks wondered what Lavender would do in such a crisis.

It was most certainly a terrible shock to the girl, and in the first hours of her fear, she begged her mother to go to him.

"It does not mean reconciliation, mamma," she said, "but once he was very dear to me, and it is terrible that he should have none but servants to tend him now. I don't mind what people say, we can afford to laugh at their remarks."

"Well dear, if you wish it I will go, but my heart will not be in my work."

"You are kindness itself," the girl answered, "you will forget my injury at the sight of his sufferings."

But Mrs. Rosavel was not destined to witness these, for on reaching The Moat she was informed Miss Allardyce, an elderly and very distant cousin, had arrived with a nurse, so that no other assistance would be required.

The police were very busy, seeking for the unknown assailant, for Francis was a power in the county, and their reputation was at stake.

Little by little, a rumour grew and spread; no

one quite knew how it originated; at first it was only whispered in corners, then as hearts grew bolder, tongues waxed louder, until there came a day when someone openly said,—

"Mr. Felix Ray was the man, that for Miss Rosavel's sake he had meant to murder Sir Francis;" and following this statement with startling rapidity was the arrest of Felix for attempted murder.

He of course was the last to hear the rumour, laughing a little over it, never for an instant believing it would be credited.

No one was more staggered than he when a police policeman informed him that they must go together to Downley Gaol.

"Why it is a most preposterous charge," he said indignantly, "do I look like a man who would shoot another from behind?"

"I am obeying orders," said the bucolic constable stolidly, "you hadn't better make a disturbance sir; and you needn't say nothing."

"But I will speak; confound it, man, I tell you I am innocent as a newborn baby; isn't my word good enough for you?"

"I've nothing to do with your word sir, only my orders. As for being innocent, that's for the judge and jury to say—I see nothing."

With an angry sense of his own impotence Felix ordered out the brougham, and in company of Constable Piffin was driven to Downley where he was briefly examined.

He was horrified to find how black the evidence (though purely circumstantial) was against him.

The countryman came forward to testify to the stormy interview between the prisoner and Sir Francis; he had seen blows exchanged, and the former standing over the latter's prostrate body.

He had heard no report as of firearms, had seen no weapon in prisoner's hand, but he had left the scene as quickly as possible as he "hoped he knew his dooty better than to interfere w<sup>th</sup> gentlemen's quarrels."

The next witness was Jenny Burns, who declared that she had seen prisoner fell Sir Francis; she was walking in the wood at the time and distinctly heard the former say,—

"You brute! I will crush the life out of your body before you shall cheat me of her (her, she supposed meant Miss Rosavel)."

Felix heard her with amazement.

In view of the serious condition in which Sir Francis lay, bail was refused and Felix Ray was remanded on charge of attempted murder.

## CHAPTER V.

"LAVENDER, he never did it," cried Mrs. Rosavel, when the news reached them, and the girl, white of face, quiet of manner, answered,—

"I know it, dear, although things look very black against him; Felix could not do a cowardly trick, and I am going to him that he may see I believe in his innocence."

"But, my dear, will not that excite hopes in his heart that you may never be able to fulfil, and give colour to the report that there is some understanding between you? Would it not be best to send a message?"

"Written words are so cold, and Felix will not misunderstand; for the opinion of others I do not much care. Let me go, mother dear."

It was wonderful how womanly Lavender had grown since trouble came to her; how she seemed now in all things to take the lead, being calmer and more self-contained than her mother, who did not now make any further protest against her visit. So it chanced that Felix sitting brooding alone, was staggered by Lavender's entrance to his cell. He started to his feet with a low cry of rapture, and she, advancing, gave him both her hands, looking into his eyes in frankest, friendliest fashion.

"You do not believe?" he said, in a hoarse and laboured voice, and she answered gently,—

"If I did I should not now be here. It was to assure you of my trust that I came; it must not be said that all your friends deserted you in your hour of need."

"You are most good to me, Lavender, and this visit gives me fresh hope."

She sat down.

"Tell me all about it, Felix, I know so little yet."

"Well, it is perfectly true that Allardyce and I did meet, and did quarrel; it is true that I knocked him down; but all the rest is a lie. The words used against me by Jenny Burns were never employed by me. I cannot think what her motive for concocting such a falsehood can be."

"She crosses my life at every turn," interrupted Lavender, thoughtfully, "she is my evil genius, I believe, and now she must needs enter yours—why? I cannot understand what grudge she bears you. But, Felix, you must keep a brave heart; when Sir Francis can speak he will clear you."

"But if he never recovers consciousness, what then? Shall I be condemned for a crime I did not commit, or discharged with a deathless stain upon my name? Better death than dishonour, Lavender."

"You shall not look on the dark side; it is but two days since your arrest, and nothing much can be done until Sir Francis is able to speak, and that clearly. The doctors are more hopeful to-day."

"Well, then, I will try to possess my soul with patience; you shall not hear me complain again; indeed, I should be ungrateful if I could do so after your exceeding kindness. But dear," wistfully, "much as I desire to see you, for your own sake I say, do not repeat this visit—idle tongues will be saying that—"

"That we are lovers," she interrupted, flushing hotly; "well, we will prove to them that we are friends only, but loyal friends and true," and he, too grateful for her kindness to abuse it, being also under a cloud, dared not whisper one word of the love which alone seemed to make life worth having.

For a whole week Sir Francis lay motionless and senseless; then he rallied, spoke coherently, and although far from being out of danger he was considered sufficiently well to make a deposition. To the surprise of all he utterly refused to speak upon the subject, showing such impatience when questioned, that the medical men protested that all enquiry must be postponed for a few days, as excitement to the patient could have but one result in his present exhausted and precarious condition.

Of course Jenny Burns heard all these things, and in her mind determined to profit by the turn affairs had taken; she must see Sir Francis, but how?

He was forbidden to receive visitors, and most certainly Miss Allardyce would not admit her to his presence; but Jenny was not to be thwarted. Miss Allardyce daily walked in the remote part of the grounds from one o'clock until two; with a little circumspection she could avoid her and win her heart's desire. Accordingly she made her appearance at the hall door dressed in her best (and Jenny's best was like Joseph's coat).

"You must go to the servants' entrance," said the supercilious footman, but the young lady slipping past him, remarked—

"I am here by Miss Allardyce's wish; Sir Francis has asked to see me," and before the astonished fellow could stay her, she was running rapidly up the staircase. She knew every turn of the house, and straight she went to the baronet's room, to be confronted by a nurse who looked rather than spoke her surprise.

"Miss Allardyce sent me," began Jenny, when Sir Francis, turning his head upon his pillows, regarded her with strange eyes, then said slowly,—

"It is quite right, nurse, you may leave us," which she did reluctantly. When the door had closed upon her, Francis remarked in a voice as cold and cruel as his eyes, "What is the motive for your lie? Why are you here? Speak the truth if you can."

"I want to know what you are going to do with Felix Ray? Why you don't say the words that'll set him free!"

"How much do you know?" he asked, still calmly contemplating her.

"That he never shot you—he wouldn't go behind a man to hit him—that when you went one way swearing vengeance, and he went the other, you were met by a woman. I was there, I heard and saw all; you spoke to her as if she was a dog, and you flung her off like a serpent—when your back was turned—she shot you, and you deserved it."

"If you know all this, why have you so long kept silence; why was your evidence so damning? Tell me that, my pretty Jane."

"Well, in the first place I don't want to hurt you for my own sake; and I don't care a fig what happens to Felix Ray, so long as my turn's served—I hate Lavender Roswell, because she treats me like dirt under her feet—"

"Three very good reasons for your conduct. I hate Felix Ray because he means to rob me of the woman I love, and it pleases me to have him disgraced in her eyes. Is that plain enough for you to comprehend? Well, we each maintain silence—what price do you ask for yours?"

"That you marry me; Lavender Roswell won't look at you; I was good enough to amuse you, I'm good enough to be your wife."

"You are modest indeed in your demands, mistress mine. If I fail to agree?"

"Why then I'll tell all I know—"

"My word has greater weight than yours. I might turn the tables upon you and swear that you perpetrated the crime—perjury is punished severely—"

She looked at him aghast; this was carrying war into the enemy's camp with a vengeance; her heart almost stood still as the suave, cruel tones went on,—

"As for marrying you, my dear Jenny, that is absolutely out of the question; you are scarcely my ideal wife; get you a husband of your own kind, and be careful no further to molest me. You were amusing, now you are troublesome and must be suppressed."

She was white with rage and fear as she blurted out,—

"But I have your presents and every note you ever sent me!"

"You meditate an action for breach of promise. Well my dear girl, take your notes into court, and you'll find you haven't a leg to stand upon; they are simply what any man might send to any woman who made sport for his idle hours;" and then the whole character of his face changed; the cynical smile faded from his lips, as he said through his clenched teeth,—

"And now you brazen fool, go home, put together your belongings, and with your brother leave Honeyhill within twelve hours, or you will regret your disregard of my orders, which Burnett shall enforce," he touched a bell and the nurse appeared.

"Please to see this person off the premises, and tell Calthorp she is not to be admitted again on any pretence;" then, exhausted by his passion and efforts, he fell back half-fainting upon his pillows, but congratulating himself that the white-faced girl who had slunk away in such a cowed fashion would not dare molest him again or strive against his will.

If only he could bring himself to let away Felix Ray's freedom all would be safe!

But bad as he was he could hardly grovel so deeply in the mire; better to say nothing; he would pose then as a generous foe, and Lavender, appreciating his attitude, would turn again to him, whilst his rival would drag out all his life under a cloud.

These reflections so soothed him that he fell into a refreshing sleep.

But Jenny meanwhile made her way to Downley; she had recovered her courage and was full of venom; she knew that her brother would visit her diabolical very heavily upon her, she would be cast upon the world with nothing but a poor wardrobe and no character to speak of.

Very well, she would have her revenge. Straight she went to the prison, and there told her story so succinctly and plainly that the inspector was impressed by it.

Briefly it ran thus: she had been witness to the affair between Sir Francis and Mr. Ray; the

latter had certainly flung the former to the ground, but he was not much hurt, as presently he got up and began to walk away, shouting out that he would have satisfaction. Mr. Ray took no notice of his threat, and soon disappeared from view; then, added Jenny, "I saw a woman coming towards Sir Francis, and when he caught sight of her, he would have gone, but she ran to him, catching him by the sleeve, and begged him to give her justice. I couldn't hear half what they said, but she kept on begging till he swore at her, and flung her off, laughing as he went. She sat up on the ground and looked after him a minute; then before I could do anything to stop her she took a pistol from under her cloak and fired at him. I was so frightened I ran away, and I did not dare to say anything about what I had seen."

Asked why she had kept back this evidence until now—why she had seemed to testify against Mr. Ray, she answered meekly, "That her father as well as her brother had been servants to Sir Francis, and she did not want to hurt him; she thought that when he recovered consciousness he would at once clear Mr. Ray of the charge against him; but when she found he would not, she had been so troubled in her mind, that she could not rest until she had seen him, and entreated him to tell the truth."

"He was very angry with me," she added, applying her handkerchief to her eyes, "and drove me away, and because I vowed I would come to you he has dismissed my brother from his service; after to-night we have no home."

Questioned, had she any ill-feeling towards Sir Francis, she sobbed—

"No; it was quite true there had been love passages between them, but when she found he did not mean 'honourable' to her she had refused to see him again; she thought that had made him bitter to her."

The story was such a mixture of truth and falsehood, told so cleverly, that it raised up for Miss Jenny friends in unexpected quarters, and she waited for the dénouement with secret triumph and gratified hope.

The description she gave of the woman was "tall and slender, very pale, with black hair and large dark eyes; she was shabbily dressed in black, and carried a small bag of rather bulky appearance;" the next day a circular appeared containing this description, and offering a reward for the discovery of the mysterious woman.

## CHAPTER VI.

Nothing had ever been known like the commotion Jenny's story made; and although her character was not of the best, it received general credence, despite Sir Francis's passionate denial.

It was an impudent attempt on the girl's part, he said, to extort money from him, and he went further still, almost declaring that Felix Ray was the only guilty party.

But although some accepted this as truth, Felix was "let out" on bail, and most arduous efforts were made to discover the real culprit.

It was, however, a fortnight later before anything was learned, and the baronet was on the high road to recovery when a communication was received by the Downley Superintendent from one Charles Charge, master of a Yorkshire workhouse, alleging that he believed he had discovered the woman in a recently admitted inmate, and proposed bringing her to Downley for identification.

When Sir Francis heard that, he turned his face to the wall, lying so for many hours without speaking.

Then suddenly to the astonishment and horror of Miss Allardyce, he said, with a shocking oath,—

"I am done for; I shall never be able to hold up my head here again. My curses on those two jades, and curse Ray—he holds the winning card. I say, you must manage to get me away secretly, before it is published that I am sufficiently well to be moved."

"Then you knew all along that Mr. Ray was innocent?"



"Of course I did."

"Then all I can say is that I am heartily ashamed of you. The Allardyces have never been notorious for virtue—but at least they were not cowards. Yet, because unfortunately you are my kinsman, I will assist you so far as I can—and then we will part, the parting to be final."

"With all my heart," he retorted, scowling upon her. "You are not so cheerful a companion that I should much regret your loss."

"Thank you, Francis; I did not expect gratitude—but I will exact courtesy."

The next day Charles Clarge arrived with his charge, driving direct to Downley Prison where they were received by the Superintendent, the Inspector and a couple of officers.

The woman, Agnes Northcote by name, was clad in well-worn black garments, these having been restored to her at her request; she also carried a small box, which she seemed loth to relinquish.

She was tall, slender, young, although she looked older than her years, and her manner was marked by the calmness which accompanies great misery.

As soon as she entered the room she began to speak quickly but quietly.

"There will be no need for a trial; I will save you all further trouble. I ought to have spoken before, but I thought—I hoped he was dead, and I did not dream that suspicion would fall on the innocent. Until Mr. Clarge here charged me with the crime, I knew nothing of the matter after I left Honeyhill."

She was warned that all she said would be used against her; waving her hand impatiently she answered,—

"I do not care. I am able to bear my punishment. I shall meet it the more easily because I have cleared an honourable name. Please to take down my confession."

A chair was offered her, but she preferred to remain standing, with her hands loosely clasped before her, and her eyes looking above and beyond them all.

Once she must have been beautiful; even now in her poor garb, with the marks of sorrow and despair so legibly written on her face, she was something more than attractive.

Without any preface she told her story.

"My name is Agnes Northcote; three years ago I was music teacher at a seminary in Highgate—by birth I am an Englishwoman although my mother is a Pole; my father is a gentleman, but poor, or I should not have occupied so subordinate a situation."

"At the time of which I speak, I was only nineteen and esteemed myself fortunate to secure it."

"The principal of the seminary was very good to me, and occasionally allowed me to accept engagements for the evening. One of these included an invitation to play at the house of a pupil, where an informal dance was to be given."

"It was there I met Sir Francis Allardyce, and from the moment of the introduction, for which he begged, he hardly left my side."

"He was only three years my senior, but in experience and wickedness he might have been fifty."

"After that night no matter where I went I met him; he haunted me; he sent me notes and flowers—other gifts I would not receive—and soon—oh,—with a tragic gesture—"you know what fools we women are! soon I loved him. One day the principal of the seminary called me into her own room, and speaking very kindly to me warned me against my lover."

"He is a gentleman," she said, "and although you are a lady by birth, folks are apt to forget this—he among them—because you work for your bread. My dear girl, unless Sir Francis Allardyce openly declares himself your fiancée, you compromise yourself by accepting his attentions, and for my own sake I cannot retain your services, unless the acquaintance terminates at once!"

"I was very miserable; but I saw the wisdom of the advice given, and I tried to act upon it. For more than a month I did not see Sir Francis; then it was by chance we met, and he upbraided me bitterly for my coldness."

"I think something in my manner made him presently guess the truth, for suddenly he said,—

"Be my wife, Agnes, and end all my miserable suspense. Prove your love by giving yourself to me now."

"I listened, I believed, and, believing, agreed to all that he demanded. For family reasons our marriage was to be kept a profound secret until the fitting time for its announcement arrived."

"I was to leave the seminary and proceed to Calais, where Sir Francis would meet me, and the ceremony was to follow at once."

"Only one privilege was granted me—I might write my people to the effect that I was married, and in due time my husband would bring me back to them."

"Loving him as I did, I never doubted him; I swear I had implicit faith in his honour."

Her weary head drooped, for a few moments she was silent, and none dared to speak, for used as they were to stories of misery and crime, there was something in this woman's manner and appearance which touched them to keen compassion. Presently she roused herself and resumed her narrative, whilst the faint colour came and went fitfully in her hollow cheeks.

"I met him at Calais; and then, when I was all alone and penniless in a foreign land, he told me it was impossible for him to make me his wife—certain circumstances had arisen to delay our marriage for months. I was distracted, and when he showed me that return was impossible for me because I had irreparably compromised myself, I think I was mad. But oh! if you knew how he can make black appear white, you would hardly wonder at what followed. He swore that he loved me that I should never go back to my people save as his wife—and—Heaven forgive me! I remained with him. Of the agony of shame I endured through those dreadful months I cannot speak; always I was importuning him to give me his name, always he put me off with excuses, until I think that he grew weary of me, and his so-called love began to wane."

"But, when the time of our child's birth drew near, and I madly implored that it should bear its father's name—that its mother's shame should be hidden from it, seeing that I was almost at death's door—he consented."

"We went through a form of marriage, I fully believing it legal, and after that I cannot tell very well what happened, for I fell ill and knew nothing for weeks. Afterwards, when I recovered my senses, I thought he had grown strange in his manner, but I hoped that our child's coming would join the severed links."

"It was born; thank Heaven, however, it scarcely breathed before it died; for, when I asked for my husband, they told me he had gone, leaving me to the charity of strangers, his last gift to me was a message of renunciation. You will find the note with all his other letters in the little box."

"Did I go mad, then? I cannot say; but it seems to me a very long while elapsed between his desertion and my full knowledge of it. Then I found myself alone, disgraced; with no right to the name I had borne for so brief a time."

"I got what work I could, and always, night and day, whilst I worked and starved, I brooded over my wrongs, until the thought of revenge woke in my mind, and soon my whole heart cried out for it."

"I did not love Sir Francis any longer then; there is small wonder that I hated him. But, hating him as I did, I resolved that I, and no other woman should be his wife. Once he gave me my rightful position, I thought it would not be so very hard to live with him and do my duty, because I could return to my own people and comfort their hearts with the words 'I am a wife; you shall not blush any more for me!' It seemed so easy to hide from them all that had gone before."

"But I earned so little, I would beg of none, and it was not until last month I found myself in a position to return to England. I had then just enough to carry me to Honeyhill, not one penny more; but I hoped that my entreaties would avail, or if not those, the fear of what the world would say, would induce Sir Francis to

give me really the rights with which he had mocked me."

"Even then, you see, I had not fairly gauged his nature. It was in a wood I met him as I was going towards The Moat, and, after upbraiding him with his perfidy, prayed him to make me an honest woman. At first he laughed at me, then he grew angry, but I would not be repulsed; I clung about him, praying him to be merciful, saying that my heart longed for the sight of my dear ones, but that they would never countenance me if I went to them as an unmarried woman."

"Go then as a widow," he retorted; "your dress"—which, by the by is extremely shabby—"will bear out your statement. Here is a sovereign to help you on your journey."

"I struck the coin out of his hand and cried on him to have mercy on himself, if he had none upon me; but he would not listen. He was mad with hate of me, and he flung me aside like a noisome reptile, turning on his heel and leaving me to my fate."

"I sat up and looked after him, then I prepared to do what all along I had intended, if he proved obdurate. He had taught me the use of fire-arms. I still carried the pistol he had given me, and I used it then for a new purpose."

"My aim was true. With a loud cry he fell to the ground, and, rearing forward, I stooped over him, laid my hand on his heart. I could not feel it beat, and I thanked Heaven I had rid the world of a fiend."

"I did not even suffer alarm as I walked out of the wood. I went on and on, walking all night and the next day. I had no money; for forty-eight hours I had tasted no food, and when I reached the Startup Workhouse I felt exhausted at the gates."

"The rest you know. When you have read all the papers my box contains, you will see if I have lied or not."

She ceased speaking. Her dark eyes met the inspector's, and seeing sympathy in them she sighed,—

"I don't suppose it is possible to keep this from my people; if it is I pray you do so, they should not suffer for my sins."

Nobody answered, because nobody could give any word of comfort.

She went unresistingly with them to her cell; there thanking them in a gentle, courteous voice for their kindness and consideration; they thought there were tears in her eyes, but she turned away swiftly and as though ashamed of her emotion.

In the morning they found her lying apparently asleep, but on approaching saw that she was dead, having knotted a handkerchief about her neck, and to, by her own hand died Agnes Northcote, the ill-fated object of Sir Francis's admiration.

The letters she had given up proved her story all too conclusively for any doubts to be entertained, and the baronet was an object of execration through the county.

## CHAPTER VII.

NEVER since handsome Allardyce ran away with a neighbour's wife had the county been in such a state of excitement; never had events followed so rapidly; everybody was on the *qui vive* for some fresh dénouement. Of course Felix Ray was the hero of the time; equally, of course, he was so fitted and flattered that a less steady head than his would have been turned. Poor Agnes Northcote was buried in unconsecrated ground, there being nothing to prove her insanity, the foreman of the jury, a rigid Nonconformist, and a too conscientious man, persuading his companions that it would be a sin to return any other verdict than that of *felo de se*. It mattered very little to the poor girl lying under the mould, but it added to the sorrow of those she left behind, and who would have given their all to have her with them once again, all soiled and snatched as she was. There were few now who did not pity her, for truly she had suffered sorely, and naturally all eyes, all thoughts, were directed to Sir Francis.

"What a lucky escape for Lavender Rosvel," said Mrs. Greaves; "because, of course, he would have grown weary of her in time. Even if he had not, and she, being his wife, had learned the secret of his past, I think she never could have forgiven him, because a man must be as pure as Galahad, as brave as Lancelot, to have and keep her love. Oh, the perversity of girls! Why could she not take Felix! But there! I do not despair yet of reading the announcement of their marriage."

The young man's first visit was to Clare Cottage; Mrs. Rosvel met him with outstretched hands and words of welcome, whilst tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Oh, how glad I am to see you once again, Felix," she said, tremulously; "it has been a horrible time! And as for Sir Francis, cannot he be punished? He surely ought not to escape. Could you not bring an action for false imprisonment or perjury against him? He really made every one believe you did it, and he would not—"

He interrupted her almost gaily.

"Oh, never mind Sir Francis; leave him to his own fate, whilst you tell me of yourself and doings since I went into 'durance vile.'"

"Oh, we were very concerned for you, and Lavender seemed unable to rest anywhere or even sleep. You have always been such friends, and, although she did not doubt you, she was afraid what the issue of the trial, and its effect upon you, would be."

"And you have come out a hero, Felix," said Lavender's voice from the doorway; "but I know you would. What a reserve of quiet strength you have!"

And then she gave him her hand, but, unlike her mother, she was not tearful. Her pretty eyes were bright with suppressed excitement, and it was evident to Felix, as he held her hand, that she had something to tell. He drew her down on the chair beside him, saying—

"Now, Lavender, what is it? You know that from a child you have never been able to hide anything."

"In other words," she answered, laughing a trifle hysterically, "I cannot keep a secret. That is an extremely rude thing to say. Oh, no! I won't hear a word about candour or anything of the kind, because, when you state I am a candid young woman, you wish folks to understand you think me a bit of a gossip. Not another word, please. Mamma, Sir Francis has gone away."

Her colour paled a little as she spoke, her glance fell beneath the young man's, and he saw that she trembled slightly.

"Gone away!" ejaculated Mrs. Rosvel; "why, only yesterday it was given out that he had had a very serious relapse, and no one but the new medical man could see him. Are you quite sure, Lavender, you have been correctly informed?"

"Quite sure, mamma; and the new medical man is the acquaintance who, in the guise of a clergyman, married him to poor Agnes Northcote. It is rumoured that Sir Francis, with his friend, left secretly last night. Miss Allardyce confesses she knew of their intention, and even assisted them to go, because she was afraid of what might happen when once he was abroad again. And this—the girl ended passionately—"this was the man I loved!" She rose hurriedly, and stood before a window looking out, whilst her colour came and went, and her breast heaved with suppressed emotion. Then suddenly she said, "Don't speak of him to me again; let him be forgotten as though he had never lived, for I am ashamed to remember that once I was his promised wife."

And, hearing these words, Felix took heart again, although not a word did he say. But as he went homewards he turned out of his path to visit that lonely grave in the drear, unconsecrated spot. Some one had been there before him, for a wreath of beautiful flowers rested on the mound. To himself he said, "Lavender's work. Heaven bless her!" then went his way, feeling that, even should he never win her, his life must be the better, the purer, the nobler, for having loved her.

The Moat was shut up. Miss Allardyce had gone away, thankful to escape the questions and curious glances of friends or acquaintances. Con-

cerning her cousin's travels, she was profoundly silent, and nothing authentic was known of his movements. The time slipped by until the early glory of summer made more beautiful this wonderful and beautiful world; still Felix visited at the cottage; still he received the same frank welcome from Lavender, and still he refrained from speech, lest their pleasant intercourse should be roughly broken. One day, only Lavender received him in the pretty drawing-room.

"I am so sorry you have had so long a walk for so mere a nothing," she said, with her gentle smile. "Mamma cannot come down; she has one of her terrible headaches, and begs you will excuse her. Then, too, I cannot stay, because she likes no one near her except myself when she is suffering so severely; so I must beg you to come again to-morrow. These attacks never last longer than twenty-four hours."

So he went away forlornly, and Lavender returned to her post.

All day Mrs. Rosvel lay tossing to and fro, evidently in greatest agony, but she utterly refused to send for a doctor, and towards evening she seemed so much easier that Lavender said,—

"You will do nicely now, mamma, and if you sleep well you will wake in the morning quite your usual self. Let me draw the curtains, the light is yet very strong."

"As you please, dear; and I am very drowsy—go into the garden a little while, I shall not need you any more. It is a shame to keep you imprisoned all day."

Lavender kissed her, saying gently,—

"It is my joy, dear, to minister to you."

But she went away a little while, to find on her return that her mother was sleeping quietly.

It was quite late when she woke, declaring herself much refreshed and almost well.

"But," she added, "I am so very drowsy, kiss me good-night, Lavender, and get to your own room; you are looking so tired."

"Good-night, dear mamma, although I would stay gladly if you would allow me; but you are such a dreadful martinet that I dare not disobey."

She lingered a little over that good-night—afterwards she was glad to remember how tender it had been, then she went to her own room, and falling asleep did not wake until the sun was well up, and the maids were stirring below.

Throwing on a dressing gown she went to her mother's room; opening the door softly she entered—Mrs. Rosvel lay with her face to the wall and her head resting upon one arm.

Lavender approached her on tiptoe; how very very quietly she breathed! and was there not something unnaturally rigid in her position?

With a vague sense of alarm, the girl bent over her; she was surely never so marble white before—strange her breath did not even lift her slender throat.

"Mamma!" the word was spoken in the merest whisper, and there came no reply.

Lavender laid her hand upon her, then suddenly she screamed once—the awful sound went echoing through the house; it brought the maids in fear and trembling to the chamber, and there stood Lavender, her eyes fixed in horror upon their mistress, her arms down dropped by her sides, her whole figure almost as rigid as that form upon the bed.

"Oh, miss," cried the cook, catching her hand. "What is it? Do for gracious sake speak! don't look like that! What has happened?"

"She is dead!" the girl answered, under her breath.

"Dead!" shrieked the maids, "oh, miss, don't say it, it can't be true."

"Yes; and she died alone!" came the answer, then suddenly her icy composure gave way, flinging herself upon her knees, she stretched out her arms across the bed, crying,—

"Oh, mother! mother! mother! why cannot I die too! Oh, if I had not left you, even now you might be with me, mother!—mother!—oh, Heaven! speak to me. It is Lavender who calls."

Then the cook, who was a strong woman, lifted her forcibly.

"There may be hope yet, dear Miss Lavender;

try to be calm, tell us what to do. Shall we send for Doctor Kennedy—mistress always liked him best—"

"Yes, yes; send at once. Oh! fly for him—although—I fear—he can do nothing for her—nothing for me. Oh, my heart, my heart!"

She refused to leave the bedside, commanding them all to leave her; but the housemaid waiting outside the door heard her moaning again and again.

"Mother! my mother! come back to me—speak to me," and wept for very sympathy.

Then Doctor Kennedy arrived, and following him came Mrs. Greaves; Lavender met them quietly; she did not shed a single tear, but she watched the doctor's face with agonised scrutiny.

As he turned from his brief and unnecessary examination, she caught her breath, and supporting herself by a chair, waited for the words she knew he would speak.

"My dear young lady, I am most grieved for you; Mrs. Rosvel is beyond all help; she has been dead several hours."

"If I might be alone—if only I could have time to think—but there is so much to be done—and I cannot do it."

Mrs. Greaves put an arm about her; she was crying bitterly, but between her sobs she said,—

"Go to your room, poor child; all that is necessary Mr. Ray and I will do—I have sent for him—oh, Lavender, poor little Lavender, ours is a common sorrow, for I too loved her."

"Yes," said the girl, drearily, as she disengaged herself from her embrace, "there was no one like her—and she is gone," then slowly she went to her own room, there to face her sorrow, to wonder despairingly how she could endure to live when her dearest was taken from her; to pray desperately that Heaven would be merciful to her and take her home.

Below, she heard the sobbing voice of Mrs. Greaves, the hushed, pitiful tones of Felix, but she heard like one in a dream, until the one word "inquest" smote upon her darkened senses.

She started to her feet.

"Oh, no! no!" she cried, running out, "it must not, it shall not be! I never will consent," then she knew someone was holding her hands in his—that someone was Felix—and saying,—

"My poor darling! there is no need. Doctor Kennedy can testify that for years your mother suffered with heart disease—she knew it."

"But she said no word to me. Oh, if she had I might have guarded against it."

"My dear, who can fight against Heaven! And Mrs. Rosvel begged the doctor to keep her state a secret from all, because she feared that you might learn it, and she would not have your young life shadowed by fear for her."

"She was an angel—oh, Felix—Felix—bear with me a little while. I am lost in anguish; I do not know how I can endure life without her—oh, mother! mother! mother!"

He took her in his arms as a brother might, and there on his breast she sobbed like a wild thing.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE funeral was over, and Lavender sat alone in her grief.

Mrs. Rosvel had left no debts, in fact she never had contracted any. All that the cottage contained was absolutely her child's; but beyond this she could leave her nothing but that poor annuity, and the girl knew very well she could not keep up the dear old home upon so small a sum.

She must go into cheap lodgings, amongst strangers, yet how to part with her precious possession, all hallowed because of the dear one who had purchased them with a view to please "her Lavender!"

In this chair she had sat talking of her engagement to Francis, praying that her life might be a happy one. This was the last book she had ever read, that portrait over the mantel the last she had ever sat for; there was nothing that did not speak of her.

In the quiet churchyard there was a newly-made mound; thinking of it, Lavender cried,—



"How can I leave her sleeping there alone with no one to watch over her or care for her resting-place!" and as she spoke her thought about the door opened and Felix entered.

He looked like one who has resolved upon one last desperate throw as he advanced and laid his large strong hands upon her shoulders.

"Lavender, you need never leave her or us; no, you must give me patient hearing now, when I have ended you shall answer;" and in his voice, his bearing, there was a new touch of authority which compelled obedience. "My dear," he continued in a low and moved tone, "I know just exactly how you regard me, I know, too, that neither your indifference or coldness could ever change my love for you. But you have given me friendship, from friendship love may grow. If it never does I shall try to be content dead heart, and rest assured I never shall reproach you, Lavender; will you stay at Househill as my wife? I cannot bear that you, so young, so tender, should go out all alone into the world; for the sake of her who loved us both so well, give this matter your most earnest consideration."

She was trembling very much; but she said, quietly,—

"You know my story, Felix; not a page of my life is hidden from you; you know that I did love Sir Francis Allardyce; now, thank Heaven, I vow I do not love him any more. Stop, if you please" (as he tried to speak) "I have always liked you very, very much; but I am afraid liking would never satisfy you; I am also afraid that I have lost all power to care overmuch for anyone. Oh, I should make you such a sorry return for all your goodness."

"If I am willing to take the risk, Lavender, are you?"

"I am so lonely," the sweet voice faltered here, "I long for a place and a friend to call my own; but oh, Felix, think, think well."

"I have thought. Slow, plodding fellows like myself never do anything rashly. Lavender, say yes, dear, and you shall never have the pain of leaving old scenes, of parting with the dear home; it shall be my wedding gift to you (old Marston wants to sell) everything shall remain as it is; and you will still be near her."

"Oh, what a heavy price you are prepared to pay for me. I wonder that you offer so great a bribe! Felix, it is your wish—I like, I trust you—I will marry you, and each must bear the consequences of the rash act."

"I am prepared to do so," Felix said; "my darling, my darling, may Heaven teach me how to make you happy—how to win your love! May I kiss you?"

"That is your right," she answered gently; then suddenly she put her arms about his neck, and touching his cheek with her lips of her own accord, said, "Heaven show me my duty, and make me a little worthier you."

So they were married, very quietly, owing to Lavender's recent bereavement; and Felix took his bride abroad.

"If poor Patty had lived," said Mrs. Greaves, "how glad she would be to see her desire accomplished; and such a good fellow as Felix cannot fail to make Lavender happy."

The next few weeks passed like a dream to Lavender. Yet through all that was strange, through all the intensity of her grief for her mother's loss, she was conscious of and grateful for her husband's tender care.

Every wish was forestalled, every need supplied almost before it was felt, and yet Felix paid her no lover-like attentions, exacted no caresses, scarcely ever bestowed any upon her.

His very fear of frightening her rendered him constrained, made him forego his just rights and privileges.

At first she did not notice these things; but when the poignancy of her grief had a little abated she began to wonder if he would always treat her with such deference, always as it were keep her at arm's length.

Then she began to be fearful lest having won her, and knowing she was loveless, he had lost all delight in her, his very gentleness and thought-

fulness hurt, springing as she believed they did from remorse that his love had suffered change.

"And why should I wonder?" she questioned sadly of herself, "have I ever given him anything? And yet, if the old Felix would return, how glad and thankful I should be."

Then she began to long for some word of endearment, some little sign of affection, only she was oppressed with such newborn shyness that on these matters she dared not approach him.

She had started her wedded life with admiration for her husband; she was very near to loving him now, only she hardly realised this yet, and the gulf seemed ever to widen between them.

Their tour was prolonged to an unconscionable length, Felix hoping that travel and change of scene would restore Lavender's old cheerfulness, so that more than nine months had passed before they turned their faces homewards.

"We will take Baden on our way," he said, "and make a short halt there. I daresay you will find much to interest you."

"Very well," answered Lavender, not lifting her eyes to his, "let it be as you please."

"But is it what you wish?" he asked, regarding her with ill-veiled anxiety.

"My pleasure is to please you," she answered; it was a pretty speech and he knew it was sincere, yet he sighed as he thought,—

"If only she would be less grateful and more responsive! Shall I never touch her heart?"

He looked much older than when they were married, his eyes were haggard and his cheeks hollow; the constant fight between love and self was beginning to tell upon him; but Lavender did not even guess this.

"He is weary of me, and tries so hard not to let me see it," she said again and again to herself; so they went on playing at cross purposes until something occurred at Baden which brought them to a knowledge of the truth, and altered the whole tenor of their lives.

They had gone to the gardens, and the evening being warm sat under the trees, now beginning to look their loveliest in their tender spring foliage.

All round them there was a babble of voices, the clinking of glasses, the ripple of light laughter.

Leaning back Lavender closed her eyes; there was a half-smile of contentment upon her lips, so that Felix was a trifle vexed when a voice spoke his name, and looking up he recognised a German gentleman whose son he had befriended.

The latter begged a few words in private with him about "that wicked Fritz."

Felix looked at Lavender.

(Continued on page 116.)

## TWO GIRLS.

—105—

### CHAPTER XIX.

NOTHING could exceed the panic which prevailed in the strong room at Diamond End when it was discovered the diamonds were missing.

The poor old butler was almost distracted; Owen Tudor, the owner of the missing jewels, was the only one of the five people present capable of calm, collected thought.

"Shut the door, Hawkins," he said gravely, "and fasten it, please, I would not have my mother disturbed by this news for a great deal."

"Oh, sir, oh, Mr. Tudor," groaned the old servant, "who can have done it? And to think it's me who have had the key of this room for months and whom everyone will suspect of the theft."

"They couldn't, Hawkins," said Arline, in her pretty girlish way; "if you had wanted to rob the Tudors you would have begun doing it years ago."

"My sister is quite right," said Owen kindly.

"Hawkins, if this mystery is to be unravelled, we shall want all our energies; once for all, understand I would as soon suspect myself as you,

make your mind easy on that score, and then we will all discuss the matter sensibly. I'm afraid it is too late to send into Thornton to-night."

"It would be of no good air," said Hawkins, "depend upon it you'd find no one in authority at the office, and you'd far better go the first thing in the morning and see Inspector Farbert himself. And Mr. Tudor, sir, you and I had better sit up in this room all night, the thieves have taken fifty thousand pounds worth of your jewels, they shan't have any more if I can help it."

"The pearls," said Ethel, suddenly, "have they taken them too?"

A hasty examination, however, revealed the pearls reposing safely in their cases, the younger girl gave a sigh of relief, but Doris seemed strangely perplexed; she alone of the five gathered in the strong room had not spoken a single word, she seemed pre-occupied and abstracted, but suddenly catching Owen's eyes fixed on her in surprise at her silence, she said quietly,—

"I have something to tell you, Owen—don't go, Hawkins," as the butler turned towards the door. "I can't help feeling what I have to say is connected with the robbery and I should like you to hear it."

In a very few words she gave a description of the yesterday's visitor, her own innate distrust of the man, and Helen Duncan's remark after he was gone, that he wore a wig, and her uneasy consciousness all along that there was something familiar about him; she was hardly prepared for the effect of the recital on Hawkins; the old butler started as she mentioned the wig and cried,—

"Miss Montague, that's the man! I was main puzzled when you said he'd snow white hair; but the moment you came to the wig, I knew it was the secondard who came here on Tuesday night and carried off a hundred pounds' worth of property. That's the story he told me word for word."

The younger girls looked so bewildered that Owen quickly explained to them all he had kept back, pointing out it was most desirable nothing of it should get abroad.

"I have not told mother the steps I am taking lest she should mention them to Mr. Douglas, and I must beg you Arline not to discuss the robbery even with the Anstruthers; the fact that the diamonds are missing must get abroad, but the Inspector warned me to say as little as possible respecting our suspicions and surmises."

"I have not finished, Owen," Doris said; and she told him of the little cardboard box still in her travelling bag, and of the tramp seen by Charles Peyton and her lover outside their old house, and whom Ashley declared was the same as her visitor.

The veins on Owen's forehead stood out like thick purple cords; it seemed to him that every minute the mystery which hung over his home grew thicker. Accepting Charles Peyton's theory, it was impossible to believe the man Doris saw at Camberwell was the same who had disturbed the peace of Diamond End, and yet—

"Mark my words, sir," said Hawkins, "it's the same; maybe he's someone you've been kind to in times past, and who tracked you out first just to beg of you, but found it easier to help himself. If I may make bold to suggest it, hadn't the box Miss Montague spoke of better be opened? There may be some clue in that."

Doris went for the box and placed it in her brother's hands, the three girls watched Owen with breathless impatience, but Hawkins retreated to a safe distance much as though he feared the box contained an infernal machine or dynamite at the least.

Cautiously Owen took off the wrapper and opened the box; he thought at first it was full of nothing but wadding wool, till almost at the bottom he took out a quaint, old-fashioned signet ring, the stone almost of priceless value, but the crest and inscription making it a dangerous article to dispose of; around the ring was twisted a slip of paper with these words,—

"Returned with thanks, being too risky to keep. Take better care of your pearls, or they may follow the diamonds. You had better keep silence or you will bring sorrow and disgrace on one who should be dear to you. What I have

taken is only my rightful share; a word from me would rob you of all you possess."

Owen crushed the paper in his hand, and held out the ring to Hawkins.

"It is one of the oldest heirlooms in the family, sir, and your late uncle set great store by it, it's been in the possession of your ancestors for centuries; well," and the old man gave an approving sniff, "I'm glad the thieves had some conscience."

"I am afraid they only sent it back because they were afraid to keep it, Hawkins," said Owen sadly, "in fact they say as much," and he touched the paper in his hand.

"Mr. Tudor," began Hawkins, "you'll pardon the liberty, sir, but where have you kept the key of the jewel safe?"

"In one of the drawers of my writing-table in the library."

"Ah!" Evidently the old man had a clue. "The key of this strong room, sir, has never been out of my keeping, night or day; but—dolt that I was, not to tell you sooner—on Wednesday I thought I never should have unlocked the door. I expect it had been opened with a skeleton key and well-nigh hampered. I looked it myself at nine on Tuesday night and went to my supper in the hall. I didn't pass that door again till after ten; if the villain had got your key of the safe out of the writing-table first, he wouldn't need to be ten minutes in here to get out the diamonds. He'd have time over and over again, while I was at the other part of the house."

"We were out," said Arline to her brother, "and mother was in bed. Ethel, did you hear nothing?"

Ethel reddened. "I was frightfully dull and lonely," she confessed, "and I went to bed early because I got so nervous; it seemed to me I heard all kinds of noises. I put it down to not being used to loneliness, and these rooms are so terribly big for just one person; I felt so frightened, but for fear of being laughed at, I should have rung the bell and asked Hawkins to send one of the maids up to sit with me. I don't mean I heard anything like footsteps, but I had got into that state of terror I was ready to be afraid of my own shadow; and when Arline's cat scratched at the door I could almost have screamed. Oh, how I wish now I had rung the bell; I feel as if I might have prevented all this."

"Don't go to blame yourself, missie," said the butler, kindly; "you wasn't to know what was going on, and if you'd met that villain when he was making off with the property it might have gone badly with you; he'd have thought nothing of knocking you down that you might tell no tales till he'd got safe off with the diamonds."

"To-morrow everything in that case goes to the bank," said Owen, decidedly; "for to-night, I hardly know what to do. I don't want the household alarmed, but I think I must keep watch here."

"And I'll sit up with you, sir," said Hawkins. "I'll go now, with your leave, and get my supper and a bit of a nap, and I'll be back here by eleven."

"Thank you," said Owen, warmly; then, as the old man left them, he turned to his sisters, "Remember, not a word to mother, girls."

"She is sure to ask why we have been so long," said Ethel.

"You must tell her we got talking, and the time passed," said Doris; "dear Ethel I can't explain more, but I feel Owen is right, and we must not trouble mother; she was never very strong, you know, and she seems to me to look less so now than she did at Camberwell."

"All right," said Ethel; "we'll leave you and Owen to discuss the robbery."

Doris waited till the girls had gone, then she carefully fastened the door and came back to her brother's side. She looked up into his face and said, gravely,—

"You are keeping something back, Owen?"

"I know nothing," he answered; "and it is not fair to trouble you with fears that may be groundless."

She nestled a little closer to him. She had always been his favourite sister, and they had shared many a trouble together.

"Let me see that paper, Owen."

She read it through, and then, to his consternation, broke into a fit of sobbing, deep, voiceless sobs, which seemed to shake her slender frame, and had in them all the bitterness of despair.

"Doris," cried Owen, fondly, "my dear sister, don't; try and be calm, darling, for my sake."

"It won't touch you," and she gave a sigh of infinite relief. "Owen, I am so thankful you, at least, won't have to bear the burden of shame; but I can never marry Ashley, and poor little Arline ought to give up Cecil Anstruther."

"Doris," Owen's face looked almost bloodless. "I don't understand; at first I thought you had guessed my fear and shared it, but your last words contradict this. The shame would be mine, dear, not yours, and Arline's; you have not one drop of the scoundrel's blood in your veins."

Doris started.

"Speak plainly," she implored. "I suppose we both agree that the tramp Ashley saw watching our empty house, the man who described himself to Hawkins as a friend of the family, and my venerable, white-haired visitor of yesterday, are one and the same?"

"Yes; and that man, and no other, is the stealer of the Tudor diamonds."

"Precisely; and he hints that, for family reasons, you had better hush up the matter, because his disgrace would bring shame on us therefore—"

"He is my uncle, Henry Tudor," interrupted Owen, "the rightful owner of Diamond End. He is under some cloud, and dares not claim his rights; but the whole property being really his, and not mine, he imagines he has every title to help himself to whatever he fancies."

Doris shook her head.

"Henry Tudor died long ago, Owen. Don't you remember mother telling us she had the letter announcing his death?"

"Yes; but"—he hesitated—"when I asked her for that letter to show to Mr. Vesey, in proof of my claim to this place, she said she had burnt it. Poor mother! she did so long for wealth. Most likely she knew the truth—that her brother-in-law had done something so disgraceful he could never come forward; and she thought there was not much sin in allowing me to reign in his stead. Stay, Doris"—as she tried to interrupt him—"hear me out. You have no idea how strange mother has been lately. She is continually hinting she has a right to everything here, and that some dreadful punishment will fall on me if I refuse her requests."

"Poor mother!" breathed Doris.

But her brother went on,—

"Only on Tuesday, the evening of the robbery, she came in from the grounds at the dead of night. She had been to meet someone—what more likely than it was this man?"

"It was the man," breathed Doris, faintly; "but, Owen, his name is not Tudor."

"What then?" His voice was troubled. "Doris, do not keep me in suspense."

"I mean that the man who has robbed you, the man to meet whom our mother stole forth from your house like a thief in the night, was her husband and my father, Herbert Montague!"

Owen gazed at his sister in a feeble, dazed sort of way, not in the least comprehending.

"Child," he said, slowly, "you must be dreaming."

"I am not." Her voice was harsh and abrupt—perhaps because every word hurt her so cruelly. "Ask yourself, Owen—did we ever have any proof of his death?"

"No; but—"

"Did not mother seem rather relieved than sorry when she told us of it?"

Owen hesitated.

"My dear sister, when a man has been only a sorrow to his family, they can't feel broken-hearted at his death."

Doris shook her head.

"Death is like charity—it covers a multitude of sins. When even a spendthrift dies his wife mourns him."

"But—"

"I think that my father got on very badly abroad, and that mother was always afraid of his turning up and disgracing her. You know

he did come more than once or twice, and his visits always meant ruin. I think she agreed to pay him so much a year on the condition that he never molested her, and allowed her to give out to the world that he was dead."

It flashed upon Owen that he had never heard the cause of his stepfather's death; that none of the wanderer's small personal belongings had ever returned to his widow; while it had been an increasing puzzle what became of Mrs. Montague's income, since she seemed a poorer woman when Owen brought home all his salary and Doris paid for her board, than in the old days when she had to support her four children entirely. It came upon Owen slowly that his sister was right.

"My poor child."

"It will half break Ashley's heart," said Doris, bitterly. "Oh, Owen, we love each other so, and we have waited so patiently; it seems terrible to be parted now."

"I don't think you need part."

"Owen! As though I would bring such degradation on my poor boy. Don't you see, even if you don't prosecute my father, the fact remains—he is a felon!"

"I shan't prosecute."

"That is good of you," she breathed; "but—"

"I shall trace him out, if possible," said Owen, gravely, "and prove beyond a doubt that he is Herbert Montague; then I shall offer him his choice: to disgorge the diamonds and live abroad on an annual allowance from me, or to be given up to the police. I think there can be no doubt what he will decide."

Doris looked upon the ground.

"I should never dare to marry Ashley."

"Not without telling him, certainly; but to my mind you should explain everything, and let him take the burden of decision on himself. If I am not deceived in Ashley Croft, he will only wish to hasten the wedding."

"And Arline?"

"I shall keep the truth from Arline if possible, but I shall tell everything to General Anstruther as soon as it is settled beyond a doubt that our suspicions are correct."

"Do you doubt it?"

"Only so far as this: Herbert Montague's being alive cannot affect my position here. My mother's tone from the very first has been a kind of veiled threat that I am here on sufferance, and if I displeased her she could turn me out of my inheritance. Now, supposing Henry Tudor to be alive, this attitude of hers can be explained; but I don't see that Mr. Montague's existence makes any difference to me."

"I see; and the note you found with the ring distinctly says the writer could rob you of all you possess. Owen," and her hand stole into her brother's, "I still think the robber is my father; but he may know Henry Tudor to be alive, and regard the diamonds as his lawful hush money."

"I never thought of that," Owen sighed deeply. "Doris, I have not been so happy here as I hoped; but I own it would be a pang to give up Diamond End. I have grown to love every stone of the old house. I had hoped," here he shaded his face with one hand, "some day to bring my wife here."

Doris felt for him. She understood so well what he was suffering.

"We may be mistaken," she whispered; "but Owen, I know you would rather spend your whole life as a city clerk than live in luxury that really belonged to another."

"Yes; you are right. Doris, I begin to think I accepted my good fortune too readily. I must wait till Christmas is past, and till something is settled about the diamonds; and then I will employ a London detective to trace out the last years of my uncle's life, and bring me the proof of his death."

"It must have been seventeen or eighteen years ago," said Doris; "and you don't even know which colony he went to. I am afraid it will be a Herculean task, dear."

"Never mind; I shall feel happier when I have started it. I shall feel at least I am not willingly dishonest."



The clock pointed to eleven. A hush stole over the house, and Doris rose.

"I must go now," she whispered. "Owen, promise me when Ashley comes you will tell him everything. I could not bear to keep it from him."

"I shall be thankful to talk things over with him. The Anstruthers and Sir John Blake are kindness itself; but Croft and I were boys together; and as he knows what poverty means he'll understand it will cost me something to give up this place."

"One question more, dear. Who is it?"

"Who is what?"

"You said just now you had hoped to bring your wife to Diamond End. When we parted at Chamberwell you were fancy free, so I suppose 'she' is a Northshire beauty."

"I think I lost my heart before ever I came here," he answered. "I have never spoken a word to her of my hopes, and I have only seen her four times; but I think it was love at first sight. I knew the first time I saw her she was my ideal wife."

"But who is it? Ah!" recollection stealing over her, "I know. The girl you found in the fog, whom Nell Duncan raves over—pretty Miss Nairn!"

Owen nodded.

"She is more than pretty."

"And she's been here lately, hasn't she?"

"At the Anstruthers! Yes. They were to have brought her over here to lunch yesterday; but she had to go home sooner than she expected, her sister was taken ill."

"I believe, now I think of it, it's the sister, Nell chiefly raves over."

Enter Hawkins, surprised to find Doris still there.

She speedily said "Good night!" warning Owen, she knew she should not sleep at all, she felt as if she had come to a castle of mysteries.

"Breakfast is not till nine," he said, cheerfully, "if you are punctual you shall pour out the tea. Mother generally breakfasts upstairs."

Doris had one of the best guest chambers in the front of the house, and from her window, which faced the drive, she saw a shabby-looking fly crawling up to the house the next morning just as she had finished her toilet.

It still wanted some minutes of nine; but a strange presentiment came to her the fly had brought some one connected with the mystery, and thinking Owen might be glad of her presence she went downstairs, to meet him in the hall, a little paler than usual, but otherwise showing no sign of his unwonted vigil.

"Come into the library, Doris. We had no alarms. Poor old Hawkins looks half asleep though."

"There is some one coming now. I don't mean an alarm, but some one in a fly."

Hawkins brought in a card as she spoke. It was simply inscribed Mr. John Dickinson, and bore no address.

It was a strange time for a morning call; but Owen directed the butler to show the visitor in. He saw a tall clean-shaven individual with keen piercing eyes, and a gentlemanly manner.

"I'm an enthusiast on archæology," he said to Mr. Tudor, looking the while at Doris, "and being in the neighbourhood ventured to call, hoping you would allow me to examine this interesting old house. My friend, Mr. Tarbert, gave me leave to use his name by way of introduction."

"Are you the London detective he promised to send for?" demanded Owen. "If so, you may speak freely before my sister. I should be glad to keep our conversation from my mother and younger sisters; but this one," he smiled at her kindly, "is fully in my confidence, and brought from London yesterday a clue which has most bewildered us."

Mr. Dickinson bowed to Doris.

"Very happy. A lady's wits are very useful if she can hold her tongue, but we'll keep to the archæology before the household please, Mr. Tudor. Perhaps you could see your way to asking me to spend the day."

"I will," I fear what I have to tell you will

add to the difficulties of your task. The Tudor diamonds, valued at fifty thousand pounds, are missing."

"Clean gone!" Mr. Dickinson looked lost in admiration. "Well, that thief was a clever customer. Pity he over-reached himself at last."

"Do you mean he is taken?" cried Owen and Doris in one breath.

"I only wish he was, and that I had had the capture. It would be a feather in my cap I can tell you—Look here, sir, do you recognize this?"

They watched in spell-bound silence as he unwrapped a small parcel and displayed poor Mrs. Tudor's jewelled paper knife, the "dagger" she had used for such a harmless purpose. Doris turned sick with horror as she perceived the blade was stained with blood.

"Don't faint, miss," said the detective, kindly, "it isn't murder yet, though it's pretty near it. The poor young creature's still alive or was last night when I inquired."

"Who is it?"

"A Miss Nairn," said Mr. Dickinson, promptly. "Not the one down here lately but her sister. She surprised a man who had broken into their flat and was rummaging in a desk where they kept valuable papers; he stabbed her, and then with all the effrontery possible went downstairs, affecting to have come from one of the other landings, and casually informing a lady and gentleman he met on the way, he thought there had been an accident at the top floor for he had heard a piercing shriek."

"And this was—"

"Wednesday night. The alarm was given at once; but though the description of the man on the stairs agreed with that of the person 'wanted' for the robbery here, we'd nothing certain to go on till we got the dagger into our custody. That was fully described in the list of articles stolen, so I came down here to tell you this, and see if you could throw any light on the Bloomsbury mystery."

Owen shook his head.

"I don't believe the Nairns had anything valuable enough to attract thieves."

"They hadn't. It is all wrapped in mystery. Miss Nairn, a very intelligent young lady, told me to her knowledge she had not an enemy in the world. Pressed on the subject of her sister, she admitted first that Gladys had only lived with her a few months, then, that though sisters in affection there was no tie of blood between them, she positively refused to give me her sister's real name saying it would be a breach of confidence; but, bless you, Mr. Tudor, we detectives know how to put two and two together. I found from the neighbours when 'Miss Gladys Nairn' first came to the flat, I got a full and particular description of her, and what do I discover. Gladys Nairn came to Bloomsbury the day Gladys Keith disappeared from Mr. Vesey's house, and the description of one girl fits the other. To my mind, Mr. Tudor, it's clear the young lady now lying between life and death in Bloomsbury is your uncle's adopted child; and I've come down here to the place where her childhood and youth were spent, to try and discover if she had an enemy capable of conspiring against her life."

## CHAPTER XX.

"You must come to Gladys, she is dying!"

Those words rang in Marmaduke Blake's ears with almost painful persistency after he had awoke from his strange dream.

It was broad daylight, for it was the Australian summer, and the sun rose early. Duke sprang up, made a hurried toilet, opened the French window and went out on the balcony, for he felt it was useless to try to sleep; instead of tossing restlessly on his pillows he might as well enjoy the fresh morning air, and as he puffed away at his favourite pipe, try to realize what had led to his strange dream.

A thoughtful, studious man, there was yet a tinge of superstition in his nature, and the vision impressed him a great deal more than it would have

done anyone of a different nature. Mr. Page, for instance, would have laughed to scorn the idea of a dream meaning anything; and even Duke's friends the Fletchers would have been amazed at his credulity.

Stretched on the basket lounge which had been left on the verandah close by his window, Duke gazed out on to the brilliant, cloudless sky, the bright coloured flowers in the garden, and the strange idea of vast space always conveyed by an isolated colonial homestead. Was it possible that now in England frost and snow were probably people's portions? was it possible that across those thousands of miles of ocean a message from his love's heart had flashed to him.

Sir John had been quite right in saying Duke refused to believe Gladys Keith was dead; the young man had such an intense faith in her courage he would not think it possible she had taken her own life, and he thought had she been ill or in suffering she would have written to his mother.

He had called on the Brandons just before he left England but had found them out; though he had given Gladys their address, and begged her to go to them if she needed a friend, he had never once in all these months of suspense written to ask them if they had seen her.

Duke's theory was that Gladys had found Mrs. Vesey's hospitality intolerable, and had promptly sought another refuge; she had not gone to the Brandons then, or they would have written to him.

As far as he could tell, there was no single friend in her past life on whom she could rely for help and affection, except those who lived near her old home, and his father's letters had told him no one in Northshire knew the secret of her fate.

In the dream he had been summoned to Gladys by Mrs. Page's daughter May Nairn; could it be that in fulfilling his promise to his hostess he should find the lost love for whom his heart was aching?

Mrs. Page had given no description of her daughter, nor could she, when she had last seen her a tiny child, but the girl in the dream was strangely like Gladys.

Could it be that the two girls, both orphans, both alone in the world, had cast in their lot together?

"When I go home I will find Miss Nairn and tell her of my dream," he declared. "She will be romantic, most girls are, so I need not fear her laughing at me, and why should I delay any longer? I have collected plenty of material for my book, I begin to long for a sight of the old country and the home faces. Yes, as soon as my foot is sound I'll go back to the Fletchers and tell them I must sail in the next steamer."

In spite of his wakeful night he looked his brightest when the family met at the morning meal, and declared his foot was so much better he thought he could venture to ride back to Mr. Fletcher's in the cool of the evening.

"Don't hurry," said Page warily, "you are very welcome, Mr. Blake; my wife here enjoys a chat about the old country, and I think you've done her a lot of good. I've a heavy day before me on the farm, but I shall be in before it's cool enough for you to start; and, indeed, if you take my advice you'll wait till to-morrow."

Duke had enjoyed a morning nap, and was feeling rested and refreshed when Mrs. Page joined him on the verandah, she held the newspaper in her hand.

"Can you spare me a few minutes, Mr. Blake? I want to have a talk with you."

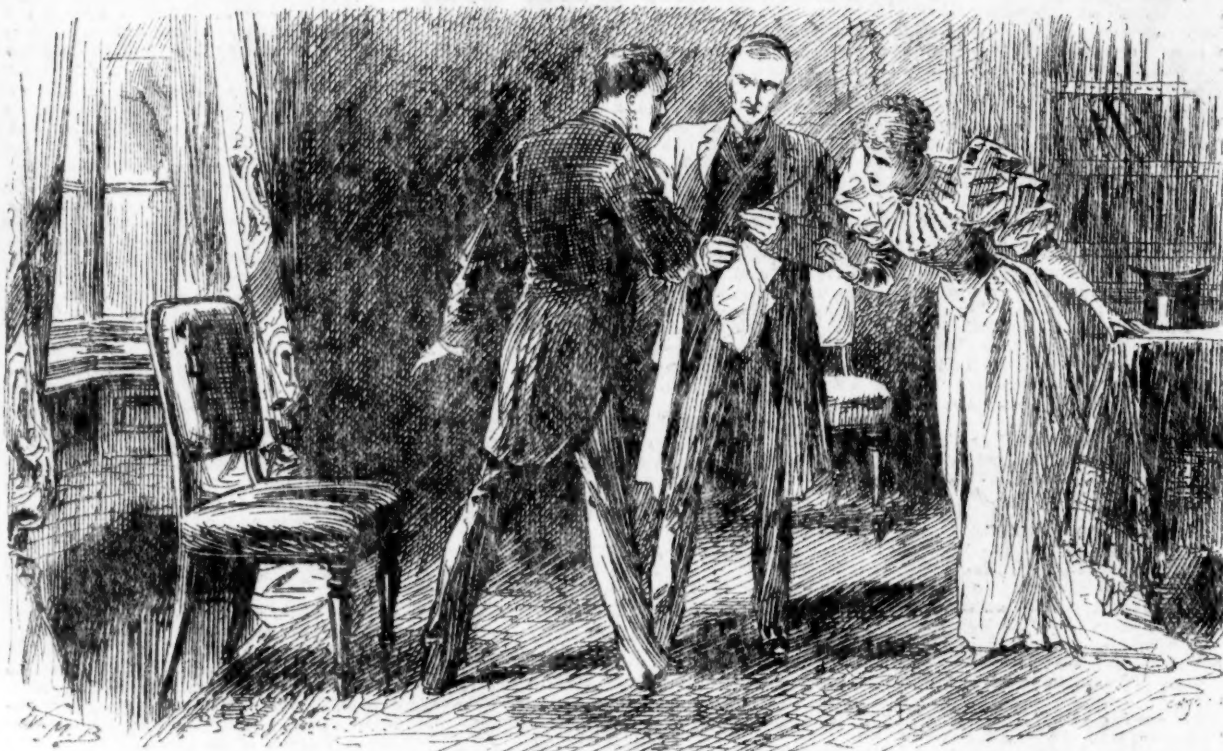
"I should like nothing better."

The excitement in her face was more visible now than even the night before. She looked ten times younger for the sparkle in her eyes.

"Mr. Blake, when you gave me this," she touched the paper, "had you any idea what it was?"

"I meant to give you the Times. I found later on, I had inflicted on you a local country paper; my mother sends it every week, but of course it has no interest for anyone out of Northshire."

"It has interested me more than anything else could have done. I want you to read this



"LOOK HERE, SIR, DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS?" SAID THE DETECTIVE AS HE PRODUCED THE "DAGGER."

paragraph," she pointed to it, "and tell me if it is true."

It was a brief account of Owen Tudor's arrival at Diamond End. Not exactly a biography, but a kind of short history of the great nephew, who through such unforeseen circumstances had become the heir of the last Squire; with the garrulosity of country papers, it informed its readers the new owner of Diamond End was the last of his name, and that apart from his Uncle Richard's will being so strangely made invalid, he owed his good fortune to another stroke of luck, the early death of his Uncle Henry, who as his father's elder brother, would have taken all the real estate.

"I don't understand," said Duke, in a puzzled tone; "what is it Mrs. Page that you want to know?"

"Is that true?"

"Certainly; Diamond End is near my home. Richard Tudor and my father were life-long friends. I can't tell you what regrets we felt at his untimely end and the old place passing to a stranger. My mother writes though, that they like Owen Tudor extremely, and think him worthy his name."

Mrs. Page's eyes flashed.

"He is a usurper and a dishonourable man," she cried; "he has no right to Diamond End, he is robbing the fatherless, the worse than orphan of her due."

"Don't be unfair," said Duke gently, "Owen Tudor has robbed no one; for weeks the advertisements for the heir-at-law of Edward Tudor (his grandfather) produced no answer, and when he at last communicated with the lawyers, he said from the very first his uncle Henry had a nearer claim."

"I should think so;" she was growing angry and Duke could not in the least understand her mood. "John was full three years younger than my husband."

"Your husband!"

"He made me promise never to tell anyone his real name, because we were so poor, and he

was ashamed of having been brought so low, but he can't mind now when it is for his child's sake."

Duke took the thin delicate hand kindly in his, he felt very sorry for Mrs. Page. It seemed to him she had brooded over her first marriage, and the trials it brought her, till she was nearly distracted.

"Tell me everything," he said gravely, "and I will do my best to advise you."

"My first husband was Henry Tudor—he only called himself Nairn when he became a dancing master; but he married me,—and our child was registered—in his own name. His father was living then, and Henry was—very wild. The old gentleman was so proud, for though he had been exiled since he was a young man he could never forget that he was one of the Tudors of Diamond End. Where was I? Oh, we were called Nairn always. When my husband was dying, he begged me to return to England because he knew his uncle, Richard Tudor, had no children, and he thought even after all those years it was possible he might relent to his brother, when my little May would be her grandfather's heiress."

Duke began to understand.

"Did you meet this Owen Tudor when you returned to England?"

"Oh no, he would have been a mere child, but I wrote to his mother and begged her to help me. She had married again and had children of her own. I thought, you know having been a widow herself, and having little ones of her own, she would help me."

"And did she?"

"She never answered my letter. I made enquiries cautiously, and I found that Richard Tudor had recently married again, so I gave up all hope of May's inheriting his wealth. I wrote once or twice later to Mrs. Montague, but all my letters except the first came back to me marked "Gone away."

There was a moment's pause, then the mother went on fiercely,—

"So you see I am right. Owen Tudor is a usurper. The property belongs really to my child, and he is robbing her of her rights."

"I grant you, if you have the proofs of your marriage, and your daughter's birth, the estate and one half the personal property is hers. But Mrs. Page, Owen Tudor is not a usurper; from all I hear of him he is incapable of a base action. The chances are he never even heard of his uncle's marriage."

"His mother knew—she had my first letter, or it would have come back like the rest."

"His mother may have kept the secret," said Duke gravely, "even from her own son. Mrs. Page, I shall very soon be returning to England. I have already promised to seek out your child and take her a message from you; will you give me another commission; will you trust me with the papers necessary to prove she is Henry Tudor's daughter, and let me do my best to win her rights?"

"You would do this! And yet May is a stranger to you, and this Owen Tudor is a friend and neighbour of your father!"

"I will do it gladly. I have too much faith in Owen Tudor's honesty to believe he would willingly rob an orphan girl; and Mrs. Page, I feel an intense compassion for all lonely girls, because the only woman I can ever love is now alone in London toiling for her bread."

Mona's eyes filled with tears.

"Heaven help her," she said pityingly, "for the world is a cruel place to a lonely girl."

(To be continued.)

EDISON is now at work with a plan to grease the sides of ships, so that they will slip through the water more readily. He says the friction of salt water and its constituents are much more than is generally believed; and if he can only do what he is trying to do the *Compania* can make the voyage between New York and Liverpool in four days.





"WHEN DO I MEAN TO MARRY HILDEGARDE?" UGHTRED REPEATED, LOOKING STRAIGHT UP AT GEORGIE WALKER.

## HIS TRUE WORTH.

### CHAPTER III.

It was some ten days later, and Hildegard Ray was passing—as she frequently did now—a quiet afternoon at the Moat House.

She had arrived at the old hall in time for luncheon; and now that the meal in the dingy old dining-room was over, she, with Georgie Walmer—for Georgie that noon-time had gone downstairs as hostess to Miss Ray—had come up again to the chamber of Lady St. Austell, in the hope of cheering the invalid, who was more fretful than usual perhaps to-day.

Ughtred, though he really loved his mother well, after his own fashion, was certainly not too fond of visiting the room in which she lay. It irked him to see her irremediable pain; and her querulousness, indeed, made him as irritable as herself.

So he parted with the girls at the foot of the oak staircase, and betook himself to the solitude of the library—which was about the gloomiest and most depressing apartment to be found anywhere in the Moat House.

The friend of Georgie Walmer, best loved next to Lady St. Austell herself, was the beautiful woman whom Ughtred was going to marry. She had known Hildegard Ray almost all her life—even as a child she had felt something of the charm and magnetism exercised by the calm, regal beauty of the heiress of Courtgardens, who of course was Georgie's senior by several years.

And Hildegard often told the young girl, in her serene caressing way, how greatly she had longed sometimes for a real sister, in character as lovable and sympathetic as she.

But since Ughtred's last home-coming, and the accomplishment of his betrothal, Georgie, somehow, had scarcely seemed the same to Hildegard Ray.

It was not that the girl was less affectionate when they were together, nor less friendly in any

way than heretofore—only a little quieter, a little sadder perhaps, with now and then a half-unconscious, half-checked sigh from tremulous lips, and a wistful, dreamy, far-away expression in the sweet eyes, that Hildegard, noting and wondering, told herself emphatically should not be discernible in the face of Georgie Walmer, if the poor child's heart were quite at ease.

And Miss Ray began to fancy that Georgie was growing weary of her monotonous, uneventful existence, and pining in secret perhaps for a change of some kind remote from the lonely old hall upon the wooded hill-side.

The place was so gloomy always, so ghostly, so silent; unquestionably an unnatural home for one so young and impressionable as Georgie, who, as Hildegard knew, notwithstanding, would never be persuaded to forsake Lady St. Austell, let the days be ever so long and joyless at the ancient and desolate Moat House.

This blazing July noon, Miss Ray, by the wide open window—as well as Lady St. Austell amongst her silken pillows—was listening to and enjoying the gentle cadences of Georgie Walmer's voice as she read aloud to them the story of the *Spanish Student*.

"Look in my face, and say if there is aught I have not dared, I would not dare for thee!"

"I have forgiven thee. Ere those words of anger Were in the book of Heaven writ down against thee, I had forgiven thee."

"Only the poets understand true love," Hildegard was thinking then, a tender light in those tranquil gray eyes of hers, a smile of infinite content touching her beautiful lips; "the love of women, I mean—the love of a woman especially."

But in reading these lines Georgie's voice had faltered curiously; and Miss Ray, hearing how uncertain the sweet low tones had grown all at once, roused herself quickly from her day-dreaming mood by the sunny window.

"You are tired, Georgie?" she questioned kindly; then she rose and moved towards the bed.

Lady St. Austell was lying there with closed eyes—the poetry had lulled her into a doze. But she opened them directly when Hildegard stood by the bedside.

"Ah, Hildegard—you! You were saying just now that—"

Georgie laid aside her book, and lovingly smoothed and resettled her ladyship's pillows.

"Hildegard fancied that I was tired," she hastened to explain. "I am not really, of course. I am ready to go on again, dear mother, as soon as you are willing or care to listen to me."

"I have decided otherwise," interposed Hildegard Ray, firmly. "I shall finish the *Student's* story, and you, Georgie, must rest your throat awhile. Indeed, it was selfish of me not to think of relieving you before."

Georgie Walmer smiled faintly.

"You are very good," she answered; "but, Hildegard, I do assure you that reading aloud never really tires me. I am used to it, you know."

"Yes, Georgie is used to it," put in Lady St. Austell, placidly.

"Well, never mind," Hildegard persisted. "You must allow me to read to you for a change, Lady St. Austell; and you, poor weary-looking little Georgie, you play audience to me yonder in that pleasant seat of mine by the window."

Georgie obeyed meekly, and swallowed the tears that had risen in her throat, and threatened to overbrim in her eyes. Lady St. Austell said capriciously, however:

"I would rather you talked to me, Hildegard. Have you no news of any kind to give me? Georgie can never tell me anything; she goes out so seldom, as you know; and no one, yourself excepted, has called on me for weeks. Lady Mountstuart, it is true, came to see me before she went to London, and her granddaughters came with her. But I believe the whole pack of them were glad enough to get away at the end

of twenty minutes. People, as a rule, detest a sick room—Ughtred himself does—invalids are so dreadfully uninteresting."

"You see," Hildegarde answered soothingly, "nearly everyone now, like the Mountstuarts, is in town; and Drummerfield, consequently, is very dull, and no news is stir. Soon, however, everybody will be coming home again, and then the neighbourhood will be gay."

"I do wonder, Hildegarde," Lady St. Austell observed, after a brief pause, in accents of discontent, "how it is you can bear to remain at Drummerfield at this season of the year—you with a house in town, and all your money too! It seems so very strange to me. Oh, my dear, if I had only your health and your wealth—"

"You forget," Hildegarde hastened to put in, lightly, so that the current of the talk might be turned—"I have been through so many London seasons, I am sick of them—I have missed so many lovely summers in the country that I am beginning to think after all—"

"Hildegarde," said Georgie Walmer, turning her fair head quietly from the window, "Ughtred is in the garden below. He is calling up to say that your carriage is waiting."

Hildegarde rose at once.

"Must you really go?" began Lady St. Austell, unwillingly.

"Yes, I am sorry to leave you so soon," Miss Ray answered gently, "but I must not remain longer. I told them to come for me at five. Aunt Bella wished me not to be late—her favourite nephew, Mr. Falkland, is coming to dinner this evening."

"You mean that young Falkland in Dr. Hobson's surgery?" said her ladyship, her worn and faded eyes lighting up transiently with something not unlike a gleam of suspicion and mistrust. "I hear from everyone that he is a very civil young man, and generally liked in Drummerfield."

"The poor folk in the village are very fond of him, I believe," answered Hildegarde Ray, smiling.

"And Ughtred—he too will be with you at Courtgardens, of course?" questioned Lady St. Austell quickly.

"Unfortunately, no. At luncheon he told me that he could not possibly come over to-night," Hildegarde replied sadly, wondering perhaps not a little at the unmistakable ring of suspicion in the voice of Ughtred's mother. She moved across to the dressing-room for her hat and gloves. "He has troublesome letters, business letters, to write," she added.

"If that were true, he might very well have attended to them this afternoon," muttered Lady St. Austell crossly. "Really I am losing all patience with him!"

Hildegarde however did not hear the comment, neither did Georgie; the latter was still talking to Lord St. Austell from the window, as he stood there, bare-headed, in the wild old garden beneath.

So Lady St. Austell vented her ill-humour, unchecked. She knew, as well as though her son himself had spoken out freely to her on the subject, that Ughtred, in his heart, scorned the bare notion of meeting at Courtgardens young Falkland as an equal. If he—Ughtred St. Austell—was going to marry Hildegarde Ray, he assuredly was not going to marry all the family, including any impossible outsider that might chance to belong to her. After the marriage he would take very good care that his friends should be her friends—certainly not the other way.

Lady St. Austell, who knew her wayward son thoroughly, was convinced that those urgent letters of his were purely fictitious, and secretly she was very wroth with Ughtred.

Even a gentry apothecary might prove dangerous—who could tell!—with a friend at court like Miss Arabella Trott, thought Lady St. Austell uncomfortably.

Miss Ray returned from the dressing-room, and kissed her ladyship's forehead.

"Good-bye," she said affectionately.

"Good-bye, Hildegarde. Please come again soon."

This was invariably Lady St. Austell's parting injunction to her son's promised wife.

She liked to keep Hildegarde within sight, as it were, as often and as much as possible, though why she could scarcely have explained.

And Miss Ray promised the invalid faithfully that she would indeed come again soon; and then she and Georgie Walmer went down the shallow oak stairs together, and out to the front of the dull old house, where the luxurious carriage from Courtgardens, with Lord St. Austell standing by the step, was waiting for Hildegarde.

"I wish so much that you would come to me this evening," she whispered entreatingly, as he arranged her light dust-rug and her carriage foot-stool—Georgie had vanished discreetly.

Ughtred only frowned.

"You have never met Mr. Falkland, I think!" Hildegarde continued, in the same low pleading tones. "You know, he is a sort of connection of mine—through my father and Aunt Bella. I should like you so much to meet him. Do come, Ughtred—to please me."

"Have not I already told you once, Hildegarde, that the thing is out of the question," was his answer, given almost sulkily. "Shall I be welcome to-morrow?"

She gave him her hand in silence, as an affirmative, and he held it dutifully for two or three seconds.

Then she withdrew her fingers gently from his lingering clasp, smiling at him, as she did so, her own sweet grave smile; but the noble gray eyes were dim with tears as the carriage rolled away from the door of the Moat House.

#### CHAPTER IV.

DINNER was over at Courtgardens; and Richard Falkland was supremely happy.

He had quitted the dining-room in the train of the ladies, and had accompanied Aunt Bella and Hildegarde back to the cool wide drawing-room, being unwilling, even for a moment, to lose sight of the woman he adored—who made earth heaven for him!

In at the windows came the dewy scent of late clover, the distant note of the cornerake, and the mysterious rustle of leaves.

The sun was gone down in a billowy mass of purple fringed with gold, and the midsummer gloaming was stealing over all the quiet land.

Miss Arabella Trott, seated in the fading light by a western window, was sewing industriously as usual—plain, homely, useful, old-fashioned needlework destined, when completed, for her village winter clothes-basket.

In a remote and shadowy corner, where stood Miss Ray's grand piano, the wax lights were shimmering like glow-worms in the dusk; and their pearly gleams were falling upon Richard's tanned face and honest bright brown eyes, as he sat there, with his long legs crossed, on an ottoman by the side of the instrument.

Hildegarde herself was seated at the keyboard, looking graciously down at Aunt Bella's nephew, her white jewelled hands for the moment clasped idly in her lap.

She wore this evening a gown of rich dark wine-coloured silk, trailing and lustreless, with a spray of heliotrope at her white bosom—a spray which she had carefully gathered and placed there before dinner, when showing Richard Falkland the flowers in her Italian garden.

And Hildegarde was looking very beautiful to-night, though she did not know it.

She had taken no extraordinary pains with herself and her toilette; it was pure chance that she was looking so well; for it was Richard Falkland who was the guest at Courtgardens, and not Ughtred St. Austell, her acknowledged lover.

Poor Dick noted well her queenly loveliness, and his heart beat tumultuously and painfully.

To his senses there was something intoxicating, something sweetly and dangerously maddening, in this privileged nearness to her.

With every rise and fall of her bosom the fragrance of the heliotrope-spray was wafted

subtly towards him—but Richard, as yet, had never once forgotten that this regal woman was the promised wife of another man.

The bitter fact indeed was staring him, as it were, constantly in the face; and so he managed to keep his heart.

Hildegarde, for Aunt Bella's sake, was doing her best to amuse the young man—and he was never difficult to entertain, being always grateful for so little; and, besides, her own interest in him was of a distinctly warm and sisterly nature; for was not he her kinsman in some vague and roundabout way, a cousin or something ever so many times removed, as she sometimes reminded him playfully?

Yet how was she to know that her simple kindness was cruel?—that at every smile, every winning and gracious word she bestowed upon him, Richard's heart commenced to thump against his ribs, and the blood to course through his veins like so much liquid fire!

Poor honest Dick! Even as she smiled down on him, as he sat there humbly on his low ottoman by the piano, her actual thoughts were with her absent lover—scarcely, forsooth, of Dr. Hobson's conscientious young assistant, who, with the most unpardonable presumption, had learned to love her for herself alone with all his strength and soul.

"Although I have consented to sing to you, Mr. Falkland," Hildegarde was saying lightly, in that all too winning way of hers which was wont to test Richard's power of self-restraint almost beyond the endurance of man, "I am really at a loss to know what to select. I have been sitting here, I am sure, for quite ten minutes with idle hands. Come, now, Mr. Falkland, what would you like yourself?"

"Oh, anything!" he answered, eagerly. "You have such a lot of songs, Miss Ray. It would be difficult for me to name one; and I'm no musician, you see," declared Richard with humility—"not like some fellows, well up in the names of all songs, new and old, and that sort of thing, you know, Miss Ray. Still, I do know what I like when I hear it, and I never forget a pretty tune."

Hildegarde laughed softly, as she placed a piece of music upon the rack before her, and ran her white fingers over the ivory keys.

"I am going to sing you *Maud*," she told him, striking a sweet chord here and there. "Of course, it is not at all a modern composition. All the same, it is a great favourite of mine. Do you know the song, Mr. Falkland?"

"Yes, I know that one," he answered, simply; "for it is one of my mother's old favourites, I remember."

"Is it?" was all that Hildegarde said; yet the supreme gentleness and sympathy of her tone and manner somehow went straight to Richard's heart, and sent up a strange moisture into his wistful brown eyes. He loved his mother very dearly, and was not ashamed to proclaim the fact, and it was so wholly sweet of Hildegarde, he thought gratefully, to speak in a manner like that. It was almost as if she had known his mother herself.

And then, without another word, she began her song, "Come into the garden, Maud," simply holding Richard Falkland spell-bound with the passion and the melody of her full, rich voice.

He did not rise from his low seat on the ottoman in order that he might stand beside her and turn over the pages of her music. As he had confessed, he was no musician—he did not even know one note from another. He preferred to sit quietly where he was to getting up and spoiling her song by the turning over of a page some half-a-dozen bars or so too soon, as he had seen other men, musically ignorant as himself, do sometimes at Drummerfield tea-parties, to the dire confusion of the performer.

He liked, unobserved, to watch her grand, calm face as she sang, and the glowing light in the beautiful, steadfast gray eyes, that were all so unconscious of the passion and the pain in his own earnest, loving gaze.

Aunt Bella, bending low over her work in the dusk, had raised her head quickly at the sound of the first chord; and there was too, upon Miss Bella's shrewd countenance, a rather anxious



expression, a tightening of the thin lips, as her keen glance took in the attitude of Richard's stooping figure, the rapt look on his upturned face, with the candlelight falling like starshine upon it—the dumb yearning in his eyes as he gazed at Hildegard Ray.

Hildegard's song was nearing its end when Miss Trotter folded her work, crossed the great room noiselessly, and took up her station close to her nephew Richard.

"My heart would hear her and beat,  
Were it earth in an earthy bed;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead!"

"Yes," muttered Richard to himself, as he hugged his knee and listened—"yes, indeed, had I lain for centuries dead, and Hildegard's spirit were to pass over my grave, my heart, though dust, would know it—would hear her and beat for joy!"

The last note was struck, the last echo of the music had died away, and Richard Falkland heaved an audible sigh, to know that the song was over. After stammering out his incoherent thanks, he was about to summon up sufficient courage to beg for another song, when Miss Arabella, speaking up suddenly from her unsuspected quarters at the back of Richard's ottoman, startled them both for the moment.

The interruption, indeed, routed completely the young man's rising temerity; and just for a few unkind seconds or so he devoutly wished poor old well-meaning Aunt Bella considerably further.

"Are you not ready for some tea, Hildegard?" said she, in her brisk, matter-of-fact fashion. "It is past nine o'clock, my dear."

Hildegard rose from the music-chair, and so Richard stood up likewise.

"I am afraid we have kept you waiting, Aunt Bella," said Miss Ray contritely. One hand, as she spoke, rested upon the flat top of the piano, the other was toying unconsciously with the heliotrope blossoms in the bosom of her gown. "You who are so fond of your tea!—it is too bad! But you must blame Mr. Falkland, dear Aunt Bella, not me."

"Yes," agreed poor Dick sheepishly, "it is my fault—no one else's. It was I who worried Miss Ray for the music."

"Well, I forgive you both this once," answered Miss Bella. "So come along directly, and I'll sing for the urn."

When her back was turned on them, Richard, stooping, picked up the sprig of heliotrope which had just fallen to the carpet from Hildegard's breast.

"May I keep this flower," said he nervously, "as—a souvenir of a pleasant evening?"

"Of course," smiled Hildegard, at once promptly and frankly. "But, oh, Mr. Falkland, if you are really fond of flowers, let me offer you a better one from this bowl. One of these lovely roses, for instance, or this—"

"Thank you," he interrupted, in a hurried, headlong sort of way, a warm flood of colour overspreading his cheek and forehead, "I would rather—I would infinitely rather keep the one I have. I would indeed."

"But," objected Hildegard, in surprise at his determination—"that piece of heliotrope is already withered and dying! In another hour, Mr. Falkland, it will be perfectly dead."

The warm red flush on his brow became deeper and yet deeper; and he drew, almost as if in pain, a quick, sharp breath as he stood there chameleoned before her.

"Dead or living—living or dead—I still would rather have this than any other you could offer me," he repeated very low, regarding jealously the dying flower in his hand.

She laughed then a little uneasily, at the same time moving her engagement-ring—Lord St. Austell's magnificent diamonds—insensibly round and round the finger it encircled.

"Well, I do not want it," she said carelessly. "There is plenty more in the conservatory, you know."

"But not like this," rejoined Richard, desperately. And he placed the drooping blossom in the button-hole of his evening coat.

"Hildegard—Richard!" called out Aunt Bella severely, from behind her steaming silver urn, "pray how much longer do you intend to keep me waiting? Come this moment—come!"

Miss Ray obeyed the impatient summons; and Dick, with his heliotrope, followed her example.

## CHAPTER V.

THE first glory of the summer was over; the mellow days of August were come—already indeed at sunset time one felt the breath of autumn in the air.

And the "leadon-footed days," for Georgie Walmer at the Moat House, went by heavily enough.

The girl, one afternoon, having first read Lady St. Austell into a sound slumber after her early dinner, had taken her camp-stool from its corner in the old oak hall, and had gone for a stroll by herself amongst the thickets and shrubberies of the neglected garden.

In a distant part of the garden, opposite to the barren paddock, with its dilapidated sheds and tall shivering poplars—where the muddy bed of the weed-grown moat, owing to a recent thunder-shower, was covered with water about a foot and a half in depth—Georgie planted her stool and sat herself wearily down. This was a favourite spot of hers—it was always so hushed and lonely.

In the midst of this solitude and desolation of nature, with the drowsy hum of insects, the splashing of the water-rats, the twittering of birds in the boughs overhead, and the remote scratch, scratch, scratch of the rake of the purblind old gardener, all falling on her ear at the same time, Georgie Walmer could muse and dream in peace. Her thoughts were never disturbed by the droning sounds around her—they belonged entirely to Mother Nature, as it were, and if anything soothed her spirit.

She had brought out with her, too, a strip of useless feminine work, one of those narrow pieces of soiled and intricate embroidery that, like Penelope's web of old, seem never destined to be finished; but the hands of the young girl remained idle, though the work was round her fingers.

She was deep in the leafy shade of the place; yet one gleam of sunshine shot straight through the network of over-arching foliage and lay in a golden streak amongst the grassy knolls and wild flowers at her feet.

Presently she heard an approaching foot-fall, a near rustling of the leaves and grass; and then followed an odour of tobacco.

The blood forsook her cheek for a moment, and her heart throbbed painfully; but when Ughtred St. Austell came up to her she was quite composed, and could greet him tranquilly with her own gentle smile.

"In the old place again, Georgie?" said he lazily, taking his cigar from his mouth, and looking down at the neat and graceful figure of the girl with a curious expression in his dark passionate eyes. "May I stay; or would you rather be alone?"

"You may stay, Ughtred," she answered, with a swift upward glance at him; and then she began to make her tiny needle fly; a hot red spot the while creeping up to either cheek and burning there in spite of herself.

So Lord St. Austell, without further dallying, lowered himself to the ground, and stretched out his full length on the grass by Georgie's side, tilting his hat over his forehead and eyes, and clasping his hands at the back of his head.

Georgie Walmer, as he lay there, could see of his face only the short crisp beard and heavy moustache, and the glowing end of the cigar he was smoking. And the girl was thankful that she could not see his eyes—those dark restless eyes of his which haunted her dreams. Why, oh, why, she asked herself in her distress, did not he spend more of his ample leisure with Hildegard at Courtgardens—the beautiful, trusting woman who was so soon to be his wife?

"Ughtred," she said suddenly, her voice low and clear, but not quite steady, "Ughtred, when do you intend to marry Hildegard Ray?"

She saw him start as he lay there in the long grass, and take the cigar from his lips. Jerking back his hat from his brows, he turned slowly and raised himself upon his elbow.

"When do I mean to marry Hildegard?" he repeated, looking straight up at Georgie Walmer with the expression in his eyes that she dreaded so much. "Why on earth should you want to know, Georgie? Tell me."

She looked aside; she would not meet his gaze.

"Lady St. Austell was wondering to me about it last night," the girl replied gently, "wondering, I mean, when—when you and Hildegard were likely to come to an understanding. You know as well as I, how anxious the dear mother is for the marriage to take place early; and I think, Ughtred, that she would be more restful—less ailing in body and in mind—if—if something definite were settled between Hildegard and you."

Georgie's tiny needle flew faster than ever over the intricacies of the embroidery strip, and her lowered eyes were fixed on the work beneath them. The dull splashing of the water-rats in the moat, the plaintive "coo-cooing" of a pigeon, the sighing of the breeze in the dense shrubberies alone broke the stillness now.

"And do you," with marked emphasis on the pronoun, "likewise wish that this marriage may take place at an early date?" Lord St. Austell demanded at last, slowly and distinctly, and still supporting himself on his elbow. "Are you, then, like the poor mother, Georgie, all so eager to get rid of me?"

Another silence, full of dreary summer sounds, but Georgie spoke out bravely in the end.

"When you marry Hildegard Ray," she said, "the mother will lose her son, and I—I—my brother. It is neither fair nor kind of you, Ughtred, even in jest, to talk of our being glad to get rid of you. Recollect how little we have seen of you during these last four years, and be kinder."

He laughed—a laugh that was akin to a sneer.

"You will be really and truly sorry to lose your—brother, then, Georgie? Brother, I think, is what you called me?"

"Have I not said so?"

"Oh, well, I'll believe you. But, Georgie, I shall not be far away, you know. Courtgardens is no great distance from here. You and the mother will of course continue to live on at the Moat House; for I should never dream of disturbing her in any way by razing the old place in her lifetime, no matter how impatient I might be to pull it down, and re-plan it and rebuild it with Hildegard's money. Do you know that I am going to live at Courtgardens, Georgie? It is Hildegard's wish."

"Yes"—with a slight shiver—"Hildegard herself has already told us so."

"Not altogether a delicate idea, is it, little Georgie?" said Ughtred calmly—"the man taking up his abode in the home of his wife! But then the money is hers, you see, not mine; and that makes all the difference. I have only my name to give her," he added bitterly; "and surely the barter is a fair one! As to a speedy marriage, little Georgie, why, if it comes to that, you know, the sooner—recklessly—it's over the better!"

The girl looked down at him then with a sudden horror on her fair young face. The strip of embroidery fell from her hands, and she clasped them involuntarily in her lap.

"Ughtred," she cried, "have you no honest love at all for the noble-hearted woman who is to be your wife, that you speak of her so indifferently, so coldly, so heartlessly! It cannot be possible that you do not love Hildegard—Hildegard who is so lovable!"

He lifted a dark sullen face, and their eyes met then for the first time that afternoon.

"Georgie!"

Only her name!—but oh! what a world of pain and reproach in the mere utterance of it; what a world of pain and passion in the dark beseeching eyes of the man!

"Georgie," he said again, his strong voice growing low and tender, "Georgie, how can I love Hildegard, how can I ever love her, lovable

and noble-hearted though she may be—I grant it—when you know in the inmost soul of you that—

What more he would have confessed then, in the wild reckless mood that was upon him, Georgie Walmer never knew. Rising hurriedly, she gathered together in a moment her work and her campstool, her limbs trembling beneath her and her heart fluttering in anguish.

"I must go in, Ughtred," she said faintly, pale now as the white violets in the shrubberies. "The mother will be wanting me. I ought not to have remained here for so long. It would have been better had I not come here at all," she sobbed to herself, as she fled, conscience-stricken, through the dense still thickets, and was lost to Ughtred's sight.

"Darling, come back," he cried out passionately. "Come back to me, Georgie, my little sister, my fair little love. Come back, come back!"

But she heeded not. She was gone. Only the birds could see him as he lay stretched there on his face by the moat, crushing down with his weight the wild flowers and the pale wood-grasses; the tremulous shadows of the leaves all around him.

"Too late!" he groaned, in a kind of savage despair—"too late, Heaven help me! To-morrow I will speak to Hildegard!"

In the library at Courtgardens sat Hildegard Ray, alone. Aunt Bella was out, visiting her poor folk and pensioners in Drummerfield.

Hildegard was cutting idly the stubborn leaves of a new periodical. The table before her was littered with papers and magazines, with here and there a volume stamped with the Mudie label.

Just as a timepiece in the room was striking eleven o'clock, Hildegard looked up quickly from her occupation at the table; for she had caught the sound of a horse's hoofs coming towards the house up the chestnut avenue.

She thought immediately that it must be Lord St. Austell—and yet, could it indeed be he? He came so seldom in the morning.

Soon the door was opened, however, and he was ushered duly in—"Lord St. Austell."

She met him on the threshold, a glad light filling her eyes.

"How good of you, Ughtred!" she said. "Dear, you are doubly welcome, because I did not expect you."

He bent his head, and kissed her. Time and experience had taught him that the greeting was always expected.

"I am come thus early, Hildegard," he began, as he dropped into a lounge chair near her, "because I am anxious to speak to you upon a subject that is of interest to us both. I promised my mother last night, indeed, that I would consult your wishes early this morning."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes!" Then she added—"Anything that interests you, Ughtred, will naturally be of interest to myself. Is it anything that I can do for Lady St. Austell?"

"Well, in a certain way, yes it is," he replied. "By granting my request, you will gratify my mother also. It is not a very formidable one, Hildegard."

"Let me hear it, Ughtred," said she, with a loving smile, "and judge for myself."

He hesitated a moment, stroking his short dark beard.

"Hildegard," he spoke at last, "my mother and I are both agreed on the point, but the question of course is, Hildegard, what say you? Do not you too think now that our engagement has lasted almost long enough, and will not you kindly fix the date of our wedding-day? There, my dear Hildegard, that is what I have come to know."

A warm flush dyed her cheek, and she drew in her breath quickly.

"Oh, Ughtred!" she exclaimed then, "I hardly know how to reply. The suggestion, the question, has come upon me so suddenly, dear!"

"And yet in the circumstances, Hildegard, it is the most natural one in the world," rejoined he calmly. "It must have been put to you sooner or later, you know. It is now August. Promise

me that you will become my wife this next Christmas—let us say in the first or the second week of December?"

"December!"

"Certainly, why not? Our engagement will then have lasted for nearly a year. Surely that is long enough!"

"The spring would be better, I think," she pleaded. "Let us wait until the spring."

December seemed to her, now, so very near; and, in contemplating this great and near change in her life, there was necessarily so much to be thought of, so much to be done. And Hildegard Ray, perhaps, was a woman rather prone to deliberation at times. Perhaps, too, she could scarcely fathom her own emotions of the hour. Her lover had taken her completely by surprise.

"It would be better to wait until the spring," she said again.

A frown settled on the features of Lord St. Austell, and his mouth under his beard had grown stern and cruel-looking. He was a man who hated to be opposed or thwarted. He leaned forward in his chair and fixed his sullen gaze on the troubled countenance of Hildegard.

"You do not love me," he said brusquely.

Tears glistened on her long lashes, and her voice trembled as she answered him.

"You hurt me," she said simply. And then added, in her winning, gracious fashion. "It is the woman's lot to obey, Ughtred—and so I yield. Ughtred, let it then be as you wish."

He stood up at once, with the magnanimous air of a victor, and took and kissed gravely the hand she gave him.

"Thank you, dear Hildegard. Forgive me if I was unkind just now," he said. "Believe me, I did not mean to be so."

"There is nothing to forgive—it was ungrateful of me to oppose your wishes," she answered meekly. "The proposition, after all, was for my happiness."

"Yes," he said absently, thinking of other things—"all for your happiness, I trust, Hildegard."

And still holding her hand, he leaned over her and kissed her dutifully on the lips for the second time that morning.

Thus was the compact sealed. Sealed with a Judas caress—sealed with a traitor's kiss.

"If Georgie were only rich!" ran his thoughts at the moment. "If Georgie were only mistress of Courtgardens and fifty thousand a year!"

(To be continued.)

## LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET.

—10:—

### CHAPTER XII.—(continued)

"I CAN'T understand. I cannot make you out," he said, and giving her his arm.

"So much the better for you," she returned, pleasantly. "I am an enigma that it is dangerous to meddle with."

"Like dynamite!"

"Exactly. I might blow your head off!" laughing.

At this juncture they came face to face with Mrs. Derwent and Teddy—Mrs. Derwent looking sulky and bored, Teddy ditto, ditto—*en route* to enliven himself and partner with some champagne.

"Stop a minute, Hugh!" she said, tapping him eagerly on the arm. "I've something to say to you about to-morrow. Come with me."

"All right," he answered, not to be caught again. "I'll see you directly; but I'm just going to dance this waltz with Mrs. Hill," moving hastily onwards, and leaving Mrs. Derwent looking after them with eyes of flame.

"How could you tell such a story? I am dancing this next with Major Grey!" said Nellie, opening her eyes very wide.

"Never mind Major Grey; dance it with me—at least till he comes," and putting a firm arm round her waist, giving her no time to expostulate, he plunged into the vortex once more, perfectly callous of the looks of Major Grey,

who was glowering with a thunder-cloud in a doorway.

After the waltz there was another promenade, a sitting out in a shady ante room, or another partner to whom Nellie was lost, as Lord Ravenhill said "square dances were very slow," and she must not think of leaving him; and, in fact, he made himself so very agreeable, and was such an adept at fascinating people when he chose, that she was quite satisfied to stay where she was in a dim corner under a large tropical plant, whilst her partner and Mrs. Derwent went roaming about looking for her and Lord Ravenhill in vain.

But all things must come to an end, Mrs. Fortescue's patience included, and after this square dance Teddy was sent round to rout up the girls, which he did most effectively; and they were once more wrapped up, cloaked and shawled, and bowling away home in the family brougham, leaving Lord Ravenhill standing on the pavement under the awning between two gas lamps, looking after them regretfully, and wishing he had the latter part of the evening to spend over again.

Then with a groan he turned once more to ascend the stairs, and nearly cannoned against a London man—a club friend—coming down in the act of cautiously lighting his cigar.

"Hallo! Ravenhill," button-holing him firmly. "I wanted to see you! the very man, I declare! Who is the lovely girl in white you've been dancing with—fair girl, white and silvery dress, and stunning diamonds, out-and-out—the belle of the season?"

"She is not a girl. She is a Mrs. Hill who lives here," he answered slowly.

"Oh!" in a disappointed tone, "is that all! Do you know, old fellow, I'd taken a most ridiculous idea into my head. You'll roar when you hear it I know."

"Well, go on. I'm all ready to roar as much as you please; only look sharp, like a good chap."

"Why I fancied she might be Lady Ravenhill!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

FOR days after the ball the Fortescues lived in a regular whirl of amusement.

There were riding parties on hired horses, accompanied by the Westbys root and branch; there were short yachting excursions in the *Constantia*; charming trips, lasting twenty-hours, on summer seas, Lord Ravenhill making the very best of hosts, and regretting over and over again that the *Constantia* was so much a bachelor's boat, and that he had no lady to do the honour.

Mrs. Derwent showed herself not unwilling to undertake this part of the business; but, as Teddy remarked to his sister, he did not "seem to see it."

One of their last expeditions had been a picnic and walking party to St. Catherine's Bay, a well known sight about four miles from Seabeach.

All the way there and during the whole afternoon Mrs. Derwent remained glued to Lord Ravenhill—there was no shaking her off.

She walked beside him, sat beside him, and engaged his attention incessantly, spite of his calm and composed exterior.

He was in a state of frantic impatience; a state considerably enhanced by seeing "that booby Otto Brown," as he called him to himself making violent love to Mrs. Hill all the afternoon.

When he heard him piping forth compliments of the most direct and downright character he felt an intense desire to throw the salad bowl at his head, and subsequently thrash him.

But why—why should he mind? demanded common sense. What business was it of his? He, a married man, had no reason to trouble himself one way or the other.

He was "a fool," he told himself bitterly, over and over again, till the words became meaningless.

What was there about this girl that turned his



usually cool head? Yes, he had been very cool-headed and sensible the last three years.

Oh! fate was too hard on him. Here was the ideal come too late. Just the very wife to suit him—young, and pretty, and good-tempered, and merry—not a bit fast though; a capital rider, dancer, a delightful companion, a perfect lady.

And here was he, married to a dummy—so to speak—and must put thoughts of that kind of love for ever out of his head.

Yes, for ever, unless his wife died; and to speculate on that he recoiled from with disgust—it was no less than murder! And yet after all, now he came to think of it, that hundred and fifty thousand pounds was dearly enough purchased.

It had bought his life, his liberty, his love. Such love as he could loyally bestow was his no longer.

By a shuffling of partners, after luncheon, Mrs. Derwent, much to her indignation, fell to Lord Westbury.

The younger and more adventurous spirits were climbing hills and rocks far afield.

Mrs. Hill was sitting alone on a little low wall, looking down over the rocks and sea.

Her hat was in her lap, a lovely colour on her cheeks, and her pretty, fair hair was blowing about her forehead in little dancing curls as Lord Ravenhill joined her.

"I've never been able to get near you once to-day," he exclaimed, discontentedly, "and to-morrow is our last day here. As you know, we weigh anchor. I've done all I could to hold on; but a friend of mine, Clifford, of the Blues, won't let me off at any price! I promised to take him to Norway, and to Norway he means to go!"

"Why should you not be delighted to go too? I thought you were so fond of fishing! Why do you want to stay here?"

"To be near you," he answered, without a moment's hesitation.

"Look here, Lord Ravenhill!" she exclaimed, suddenly, "you must not say such things! I won't have it, whether in jest or earnest!" very decidedly.

"I'm not in jest, I can assure you! Why should I not speak the truth? Why must one act and speak lies?" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Fate has been hard on me. I sold my birth-right for money. I gave my life, my happiness, my liberty, my right to live and choose my love as other men, for money—for one hundred and fifty thousand pounds! Heavens! at times I feel as if I had sold myself to Satan!" taking his hat off, and passing his hand through his short, crisp hair.

Nellie gazed at him in amazement.

He was quite different to the composed, polite, agreeable Lord Ravenhill of everyday life. He seemed to have opened a door in his heart and told her to look in.

He looked grave always, but sometimes more than grave to-day.

"If you were my wife," he said, after a long silence, "how different it would be then! Yes," he said, hastily interrupting his companion, "I know what you are going to say, the usual formula, 'What would your wife say?' If I have said too much, forgive me, Nellie, I will never transgress again; and I will be content to be your loyal and true friend."

Seeing that she did not reply, but kept gazing seawards, as it were, lost in a trance of speculation, he added, very humbly,—

"You are angry with me, I see. What are you thinking about so seriously?"

"I am thinking of what my husband would say to all this," she replied at last, in a slow, measured voice.

"Your husband, if I may mention him, is dead! How can your life concern him now?"

"My husband," she replied, facing him with scarlet cheeks, "is not dead! He is as much alive as you are!"

"Not dead!" he echoed, turning very pale and recoiling a step or two. "And where is he?" imperatively.

"Where your wife is, perhaps!" smiling.

"This is no subject for joking," he exclaimed angrily. "Why did you lead me to suppose you were a widow?"

"What did it matter?" she calmly inquired.

"Nothing whatever, so long as you had a little amusement at my expense, and made a fool of me!" he said, bitterly.

"But why is there any more harm in my having a husband than in your having a wife? Come now, be reasonable!" smiling.

"No"—recovering himself a little—"no harm in deceiving anyone, of course! What was the good of pretending you were a widow and letting me believe that you were almost entirely alone in the world like myself? Do you think I would have offered you my friendship and my sympathy if I had known all along that you were laughing at me in your sleeve? Where is this husband of yours, then?" he demanded, after a pause. "Why don't you go to him instead of posing before the world as an unprotected, friendless—"

"There is nothing to be gained by being rude!" interrupted Nellie, quickly. "I never 'posed' as you call it, in any way! I never asked for your friendship—you offered it to me! And as to going to my husband, there is a very sufficient reason why I should remain away—a most excellent reason, you will allow."

"And what is that?" he asked sharply.

"He does not want me!" turning her face seawards.

"Who is he? What is he? What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Oh, three questions in a breath! Which am I to answer first? The last I suppose. He is good and handsome, and young, and rich, and popular, and—"

"Excuse me!" interrupting her with a face that had grown darker and darker at each of these adjectives. "I will not trespass on your confidence. He is perfect of course. It only surprises me that two such unexceptionally delightful people as you and he can possibly live apart!"

"Remarkable, is it not?" coolly dropping a little stone over the wall into the sea below.

"And now you don't like me at all, I see, and you don't want to be friends with me?" she asked, with a pretty little pout.

"No, I don't!" angrily. "If you could deceive me in one thing you would in another. Why could you not have told me all this about—about, your husband at first? It's not likely that he would approve of your burying him prematurely, and striking up friendships with young men like me, though the friendship that I offered was rooted in honour alone."

"You would not allow your wife any friends, then?" she inquired, with a smile. "I see you can be awfully jealous—jealous as Othello himself!"

"Not if she was a pretty young girl like you, without any natural protector! By George! I should rather think not! I would wring any fellow's neck I saw speaking to her twice."

"Pleasant—for the fellow!" said his companion, laughing, and getting down from her perch on the wall. "Well, now that we have discussed all our affairs, I suppose we may be wending our way home. I see Lady Westbury and Sir Otto going down the hill, and beckoning to us frantically."

"Yes! I suppose we may as well be on the move!" he assented gloomily. "And here I shall say good-bye to you. I mean good-bye in earnest; not the public good-bye we go through before our friends. Good-bye," holding out his hand, "Good-bye, Nellie, and Heaven bless you. After to-day we shall perhaps never meet again. Take my advice as a friend, a true friend, and make it up with your husband. The overtures should come from a wife first; it is more than likely that you were in the wrong when you parted. Perhaps you deceived him in some way, and there's nothing that a man hates so much as that. If he was the one to blame, forgive him. Give him another trial! I daresay, indeed, I am sure," looking at her wistfully, "that he must be fond of you, and you of him. Perhaps it is only some slight rift that has widened and

widened till you have lost sight of each other in this great, busy, noisy, struggling world. If I could bring you two together again I would, and in doing so I know I would be acting as your truest and best friend. A young woman like you, living mysteriously apart from her husband, occupies a false and anomalous position. I speak to you now as if you were my own sister, and even if you have a little to put up with, who is perfect? We are all mortal, and you will be much happier in your own home than drifting aimlessly about on the tide of circumstances. Perhaps some day I shall see you in your home, and you will remember the advice I gave you here one August afternoon on St. Catherine's Hill! You won't thank me now for saying go back to your husband, and make up your quarrel. But you will then."

During this long speech Nellie had been gazing at her companion with remarkable fluctuations of expression—at one moment pale as death, at another crimson as the red rose.

Should she tell him? Should she reveal herself? No, not yet—not yet!

Her self-command was fast leaving her; she felt herself shaking all over, and a lump that boded ill for her, rising in her throat—her husband viewing her speaking face, in which all her passing emotions were reflected, with no suspicion of their real cause.

He attributed her pallor, her blushes, her clouded, dewy eyes to the fact that he was working successfully upon her feelings, and touching her heart with forgiveness and remorse, and thus putting her well on the road to a reconciliation with her lord and master, and redoubled his eloquence.

"And here"—drawing off a plain ring—"you recollect the story of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex? I give you this ring to keep; but if ever you should be in any danger, or difficulty, or trouble, send it to me, and I will come to your assistance, no matter at what cost. And now"—finally wringing her hands—"good-bye."

At this moment Nellie's feelings, which had been wrought to the highest pitch, completely gave way, and she burst into tears, and leaning back against the stone wall covered her face with her two pretty little hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break; while her husband looked on, overwhelmed with amazement and dismay.

It was not for him to comfort and console another man's wife, much as he felt tempted to do so; and he stood with his hands clenched hard down in either pocket of his coat, and manfully resisting temptation.

Presently the storm was over; the sobs died away into long drawn gasps and long, shuddering sighs; and Nellie, drying her eyes very slowly, glanced dubiously and bashfully at her companion.

She was making up her mind about something. At last it came, in a low, rather timid voice.

"Hugh!"

She had never called him by his Christian name before, and he started perceptibly; but this was nothing to what was to follow.

"Hugh—you may—kiss me—if—you—like!"

Had his ears deceived him, or had she gone out of her senses?

He gazed at the pretty little blushing, tear-stained face before him in incredulous amazement during a silence which lasted while you could count ten.

"No, thank you," he said at last, with a supreme effort. "I am not in the habit of kissing other men's wives."

"You won't?" disbelievingly.

"No"—very resolutely—"I won't."

In another second his late companion was half-way down the hill.

So sudden and rapid was her flight that he stood looking after her, as if he had been turned into one of the surrounding rocks.

He watched her headlong descent till she reached the bottom, when she apparently joined some straggler belonging to their party.

As for him his mind was quite thrown off its balance; he required a good smoke to bring him

round—his divinity had fallen full fathoms five in his estimation.

"Yes," he declared to himself, "and he had been rather an ass not to take her at her word," he muttered, as taking her late seat upon the low stone wall he smoked away with his eyes fixed intently on the sea.

He would let them go home without him; he was not in the humour for Conny's society, and still less inclined for that of Mrs. Hill. Now he understood why she was separated from her husband; it was all as plain as a pikestaff now.

A woman that went about the world offering kisses—offering them to young men—was not likely to be much to boast of as a wife.

No wonder the domestic hearth could not contain her; and he had thought her the model of her sex, had sworn to be her champion and her friend, had given her his ring in the most Quixotic manner. For fully half an hour he never moved, but sat motionless and buried in thought.

"By George!" he said aloud, rising at last, and tossing the remains of his cigar over the cliff. "One thing is very certain, and that is, that I have been and gone and made a most complete and finished fool of myself."

So saying he produced and lit another cigar, and slowly and meditatively sauntered down the hill.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

LORD RAVENHILL did not see Mrs. Hill before the *Constantia* started away to Norway.

He called on the Fortescues to make a hasty adieu, and was not a little relieved to find that the pretty face which had been a magnet to him for so long, was not to be seen among the family circle.

Mrs. Hill was out; she saw the last of him, nevertheless, as she stood alone on the end of the Admiralty Pier, and watched the yacht slowly steaming past, tossing the spray from her bows.

She could almost have thrown a stone on the deck, she was so close—close enough to see distinctly every soul on board, including her husband in his blue serge suit, standing on the bridge with his friend Captain Churchill, evidently in the very best of spirits, and anticipating the trip with as much zest as any schoolboy, in spite of what he had declared to her scarcely twelve hours ago. So much for men!

As long as they are with you they will tell you all kinds of stories, but the instant part or other interests, or, worse still, another woman came between you, you were forgotten.

He, for instance, did not even once look back on Seabeach, where he had spent so many, many happy hours with her; he did not bestow as much as a parting glance on the busy Parade where they had so often walked together, on the chalky hills, nor the sheltering beach, each of which had a special little memory of their own.

No, his face was set resolutely seawards. He never once looked back; his heart was not in the highlands, nor with her. It was with the salmon in the foaming, swirling, Norwegian river. Better so, at any rate, than with another woman.

She was sorry now, as she watched the fast receding yacht, that she had not given him a hint at her identity. She had had great opportunities, and coquetted with them all.

When would she see him again!—within a few months, a few years, or never? Perhaps if he had known who she really was, he would have been quite different. Who knows?

He might have been filled with the deepest aversion instead of admiration.

Still her eyes followed the yacht now becoming a dimmer and dimmer little speck, as she leant her elbows on the cold stone parapet, and with her chin in her hands, gazed and gazed as well as the tears would permit.

"So here you are!" said a loud, jocular voice at her elbow. "Seeing the last of him!—oh! Here, have another look!" tendering a pair of glasses in mother-of-pearl case.

Mrs. Derwent it was, bold, confident-looking, and beautifully dressed, who now stood at Nellie's side, with an expression of contemptuous amusement on her face.

She had not failed to see two tears hastily wiped away. Nothing of that kind ever escaped her, and she was going to give Mrs. Hill a piece of her mind, and to warn her off from poaching in her preserves in the future.

"No, thank you," said Nellie, waving away the proffered opera glasses. "I don't want them."

"Ah! his face is too well imprinted in your mental vision, I suppose! You admire him, as we all do. But let me give you a hint, a friendly hint: it is unwise to be too much impressed. He has a wife!"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Nellie, impatiently.

"She is blind—blind from her birth—and half idiotic, and I hear in wretched health. They say she can't last more than another month or two, and I am sure her death will be a happy release. What say you?"

Nellie could not exactly regard her own demise as a happy release, so she poked a little bit of gravel carefully out from between two stones, and said nothing.

"You knew he was married, of course!"

A nod signified her companion's assent.

"It was all for money. A regular business transaction, just to keep the coin and the title together. Of course next time he will please himself, and choose somebody more suitable."

"I suppose so," assented the present Lady Ravenhill.

"I daresay you can guess who it will be," smiling. "We were engaged once, before this wretched farce of a marriage, but neither of us had anything to marry on; of course, now it is another affair."

"Do you think—think it right to speculate on another woman's death like this?" suddenly burst out Mrs. Hill, with blazing cheeks. "She is not dead yet, remember. I think it awful taste, to say the least of it, engaging yourself to a man in his wife's lifetime; and anyway, I am the last person to whom you should make these confidences!"

"Why?"—with a sneer—"because you are in love with him yourself! You need not look so furious; and I am sorry to dissipate your day-dreams, my dear; but when Lady Ravenhill dies, Lord Ravenhill is under a promise to me! I am waiting for him. I have had many excellent offers, but I intend to be true to my first love!"

"I—I can't believe Lord Ravenhill ever engaged himself to you in any such way," said Nellie, defiantly.

"Not in so many words, perhaps, but I prefer deeds."

"Tell me then of one deed that will substantiate your statement."

For all reply, Mrs. Derwent raised her exquisitely gloved hand, and pointed a long taper finger in the direction of the now barely visible steam-yacht.

"Well, I see nothing but her smoke," said Nellie, impatiently. "Do you mean that it is all smoke," sarcastically.

"There is no smoke without fire," asserted Mrs. Derwent. "What is she called for instance?"

"The *Constantia*, of course."

"And am I not called *Constantia* too?"—triumphantly. "Has it never struck you that she was named after me?"—with a malicious smile. "Now are you convinced?"

"No, not yet," replied Nellie, valiantly. "That may only be a coincidence."

"Your incredulity is absolutely astonishing. However, I will show you something that is not smoke, and could not possibly be a coincidence," and putting her hand in her pocket she drew out a blue morocco letter-case beautifully finished, and evidently containing not a few epistles.

She laid it down on the stone parapet (they were at the very end of the pier, far away from the usual promenade, and quite alone, save for a fisherman and two or three sailors, who had been watching these two pretty women with undisguised curiosity).

Very deliberately Mrs. Derwent opened the case, and very deliberately selected a letter. It was in Hugh's handwriting.

"You may look at the first line," said Connie, taking it out of the envelope, and holding it before Lady Ravenhill's eyes. It began,—

"My own darling Connie."

"You may read it all if you like," said Mrs. Derwent, condescendingly.

"No, thank you," shaking her head.

"Here is the end—see!"—turning it over—

"yours till death, Hugh Ravenhill."

See! yes, she did see. The paper was swimming before her, but she made a valiant effort, and rallied her senses once more.

"Now are you answered?"

"No, not yet. This letter may have been written to you years ago, before—before he was married."

"Well, you are a disbelieving little heathen! Here, will the envelope convince you? It is just a week old—see! 'Seabeach, August 10th.'"

Yes, here was the date, and the address was in his hand. There was no more to be said. He had actually written this letter to Connie within the last week. "Men were deceivers ever."

"Now you are convinced; I see it in your face, and I may put away my little treasures," commencing to gather up up several letters and stow them away.

"I want to ask you one thing, Mrs. Derwent," said Nellie, with a great effort, and with ashen pale lips. "What is your object in showing me all this, and displaying your love-letters?"

"My motive and my object is for your good—your good alone, my dear girl," with a mocking smile. "I know Hugh was very attentive to you. I don't mind it in the least. I like him to amuse himself. It is a little way he has, which means nothing—absolutely nothing!"—spreading out her hands, with the glasses in one and the letter-case in the other. "But it was hard on you, I must confess; and as you might have been nursing hopes which can never be fulfilled, I thought I would give you a hint—a stitch in time saves nine."

"Thank you," replied Nellie, ironically, and mastering her passion by a great effort; "but do you think you were wise to confide so much to me, a stranger—a stranger, who does not claim to be anything else! Supposing I were to retail to all Seabeach society what you have just been telling me—that Lord Ravenhill is your lover, that he writes to you in the tenderest manner, and that you are engaged to be married, whenever his wife dies, and the sooner she is out of the way the better! What will people say to you when I repeat this pretty little scandal?"

"You would not dare!" cried Conny, becoming yellow under her pearl powder and rouge.

This little Mrs. Hill had more in her than she imagined.

"Dare—and why not?"

"You have no witnesses, nothing but your own unsupported testimony; and if you repeat this scandal, as you call it, I shall declare it is a scandal, and nothing else—a wicked malicious libel, made up by you, and shall swear that I never told you a word about Lord Ravenhill, that I never had a letter from him in my life, and that the whole story from first to last is a lie! Now, go and tell! Now, go and tell as fast as ever you like! Be quick. Don't lose any time! I see the Fortescues coming down the pier."

Nellie gazed at her unscrupulous companion with an expression of contemptuous disgust. Had her ears deceived her? Such depravity almost took away her breath.

She could not trust herself to speak, and without a word, turned away leaving Mrs. Derwent for a moment mistress of the position, but, on second thoughts, she found her wife and her courage, and, quickly retracing her steps, came up to where the black-eyed widow still leant against the parapet.

"One last word, Mrs. Derwent," she said, in a low, but perfectly distinct voice, "your wicked secret shall be safe with me; but I may as well tell you that as long as I live you will never marry Lord Ravenhill."

And before the astonished Conny had found the power of speech she was gone, was walking



down the pier with her head very erect, having had the privilege of firing the last shot, and saying the last word!

## CHAPTER XV.

AFTER the excitement of the last month, and the many new events that had made it ever memorable, Mrs. Hill felt a reaction and a flatness in her life that she had never experienced before.

The days dragged on. She cared no longer for riding, or reading, or walking, or even talking. Life was a weariness. She seemed to have nothing left to live for now.

Although she did her best to rouse herself in the family circle, the change in her spirits was not lost on them all, and it was agreed that she and Jenny Fortescue were to accept a most pressing invitation to spend a couple of months with Mrs. Fortescue's sister, Mrs. Monckton, at her place down in Shropshire.

The Moncktons were wealthy, had no children, and were never so happy as when they had their house crammed with company.

Monckton Grange was a very delightful place to stay at. It embodied the picturesqueness of an old Tudor mansion with all the elegant luxuries of the nineteenth century. It had warm, silken-curtained rooms, soft, delicious easy-chairs, a French cook, a haunted room, long, narrow winding passages, and several corkerew staircases, putting the chief oaken flight at one side.

It boasted excellent covert-shooting, and was the centre of a fashionable and social neighbourhood.

Lord and Lady Westbury lived in a white Italian palace about three miles off, and Lord Ravenhill's family mansion was only eight miles away as the crow flew.

A few days after Nellie's arrival she was selected by Mrs. Monckton to accompany her on a round of visits.

Very pretty she looked as she took her place in the neat and cosy brougham, with fur rug and foot-warmer. She wore a rich, brown velvet costume, trimmed with sable, and a little brown velvet princess bonnet made a very good background for her fair hair.

After trotting about the muddy roads and paying several duty calls, they found themselves with West Towers next on the list, and bowing up the approach to Lord Westbury's door.

Yes, her ladyship was at home, and they were not sorry to unpack themselves, and followed the powdered footman across the softly-carpeted hall, through two large reception-rooms, and finally into a warm, snug, scented boudoir, which was empty.

A splendid fire glowed in the logs, a fat pug lay curled up before it, too fat and too comfortable even to rise and gaze at the strangers—or stranger, for Mrs. Monckton was an old friend.

Tea was standing on a low table near Lady Westbury's pet chair, and this beverage was eyed by both ladies with pleasurable anticipation, for they were both fanatical devotees of bohea.

"And have you been counting the hours till we met?" said a gay, bold female voice from an inner room, behind a curtain.

A man's laugh and some unintelligible muttering were the only audible reply.

Here Mrs. Monckton discreetly coughed, and the man said,—

"I say, is there going to be no tea this evening?" pushed away the curtain, and Lord and Lady Ravenhill were once more face to face.

He was in full hunting get-up. His top-boots were spick-span, he carried his hunting-crop in his hand, and the colour of his scarlet coat was reflected in his wife's face as she beheld Mrs. Derwent's figure, in a well-fitting green habit, following him with a gently-detaining hand on his arm.

Here was proof positive, said Nellie to herself, as she accorded the pair a very wintry reception. Wintry or not, it did not freeze her husband.

He was evidently charmed to meet her once more, and when Lady Westbury and Mrs. Monckton, and Mrs. Derwent and a young Guardsman were chatting most sociably over the tea and tea-cake, endeavoured to draw her into friendly converse with himself.

He sat exactly in front of her, on a low velvet chair, with his crop across his knee, a cup of tea in hand, and evidently wished to re-cement their friendship.

"How awfully well you are looking, Mrs. Hill!" he said. "The country air agrees with you down to the ground."

"Am I?" she answered briefly, toying with her teaspoon.

She felt inclined to return the compliment.

The scarlet coat was most becoming to his dark hair and eyes, and the excitement of the late run had not yet died out of his countenance—or was it the pleasing result of a meeting with his "own darling Conny?"

This view of the subject was not without a chilling effect upon Lady Ravenhill. Her answers were as cold and as sharp as hailstones. Her pretty face might have been represented as a hard frost.

"What on earth has come to you, Mrs. Hill?" he said at last, irritably, even his patience worn threadbare. "Last time we met we were capital friends—(friends, and, by George! she had offered to kiss me! he remarked to himself)—and now you won't even speak to me! What have I done? Why am I in your black books? Won't you tell me?" looking her straight in the face with his handsome dark eyes.

"There is nothing to tell," she answered, colouring.

"Oh! I was afraid I had had the misfortune to offend you," he answered. "And what have you been doing with yourself since last August?"

"Nothing—nothing—out of the way," she replied.

Then—dropping his voice suddenly, and leaning a little towards her—"I suppose you have not made it up with him yet?"

"Him?" she coloured; "what do you mean?" very sharply.

"Your husband, of course. You know you told me about him that day on St. Catherine's Hill. Have you made friends?"

"No," she answered, becoming very red, and stroking her face in her muff with deep attention.

"And won't you? You said he was good, popular, handsome, clever; you see I have it all pat."

"But I have since discovered that he is not—not what I said, quite *au contraire!*" she answered, without raising her eyes.

"When? Then the gulf is wider than ever, no chance of a truce—eh?"

"Not the slightest," with a bitter little laugh.

"Poor devil," compassionately; "I'm sorry for him. You might give him a chance!"

"I never give chances," crossly.

"But what has he done?" Seeing her face harden with haughty astonishment, he hastened to add, "I beg your pardon, I am asking very impertinent questions—your face answered. I know what he has done just as well as if you had spoken, and the secret shall never pass my lips."

"You are quite too clever, but I doubt your power of divination, notwithstanding," she returned, sarcastically.

"Shall I prove my words? Shall I tell you his fault?"

A nod of acquiescence—then leaning towards her,—

"He has been making love to another woman! That's just the one thing your sex never pardons. Yes, I see I am right, but how he could it is beyond me to understand. One would almost say that he had never seen you!"

"Almost, indeed! I believe Mrs. Monckton is going, so I will say good-bye," rising.

Mrs. Monckton did not leave without engaging Mrs. Derwent to spend a week with her, also Lord Ravenhill, and Captain Montagu, the Guardsman, who had been viewing Ravenhill's long *à la tête* with the pretty girl in brown with envious and impatient eyes.

Yes, Mrs. Monckton was having a meet—a big dinner and some theatricals next week, and a house full of people.

Lord Ravenhill, Mrs. Derwent, and Captain Montagu were all delighted to accept.

"What a handsome man that young Ravenhill is—is he not, my dear?" said Mrs. Monckton, as they rolled away down the avenue, leaving him standing bare-headed on the steps. "And what a sad thing it is about his wife! She really ought to die, poor thing, and leave him free," added the old lady, pulling the fur rug nearly up to her chin.

"Why should she die, dear Mrs. Monckton?" said Nellie, looking away out of the window, and leaving not a part of her profile to be seen.

"Because her life is a burthen to herself. She is blind, and her mind is quite gone. The old lord made the marriage; it was a wicked act in my opinion, but legal. Of course there are no children—no heirs—and he is placed in a very strange position—a married man, without a wife."

"Does he live down here much?" said Mrs. Hill, still looking out of the window, with a face the colour of a peony.

"No, scarcely ever, but latterly I'm sorry to say he is down very often, for there is an attraction."

"Mrs. Derwent?"

"Pooh! No, he is an attraction for her, but that is all blown over with him! She is older than he, and *passive*, and fast, and not a woman I like, between you and me; but she is a standing dish at our theatricals, and makes things go."

"And this other attraction?" said Nellie, in a hard, mechanical voice.

"Not a young person in his own rank of life at all, my dear"—speaking in a whisper—as if it were possible the coachman could overhear her, when they were bowling along ten miles an hour homewards bound.

"And who is she?" she asked, with trembling lips.

"She is a girl who used to live at Lord Craven's Lodge; we pass the gates directly—look out on your side of the road and you will see her where she comes from—a pretty, tall, fair girl, that has an air quite above her station."

"Do you really mean that he admires her?"

"Admires her is putting it very mildly, my dear! They say that the moment the breath is out of his wife's body he will marry her!"

This was hard on Nellie—very hard, indeed. Here were two women waiting to marry her husband the instant she would be so obliging as to die!

"How do you know?" she inquired with characteristic persistence. "Maybe it is only country gossip—things are magnified and exaggerated."

"No exaggeration in this case, I am afraid," said Mrs. Monckton, shaking her head, with great solemnity. "This girl used to live at the Lodge at Craven Park, and was a pretty, modest, respectable girl, and in my own class in Sunday-school; and really quite a superior sort of young woman. Now, I would not even look at her. She has," lowering her voice to a whisper—"a child! Just fancy! She is not one bit ashamed of herself; and as to her old uncle with whom she lives, he has long been half an imbecile, and has no control over her—the mix! She tells all inquirers to mind their own business. They were turned out of Craven Gate Lodge, of course. We could not have such a scandal under our very noses, and he has taken a cottage for her about three miles off, near a very quiet, out-of-the-way village. I hear she has a splendid sealskin coat, and actually has the effrontery to go to church in it! Did you ever know such depravity?"

"There's where she used to live!" she added, excitedly, as they flashed past the great iron gates of Craven Park. "The place is shut up. It's a great loss to us—the big place I mean, of course. Lord Craven and his sons don't get on at all. They say they are an awfully wild lot, and he is a horrid old skinflint, and as proud as Lucifer,

The eldest one is in the army. I don't know how he lives, I'm sure. His father does not allow him a sou besides his pay. He is abroad somewhere or other."

"Are you quite certain that—that is Lord Ravenhill—about—you know what I mean—this girl," stammered Nellie, at last, when she could get in a word.

"Quite certain, my dear. He has been seen walking with her, talking with her, and all that sort of thing. Of course it is only spoken of with bated breath, you know; but the world seems turned upside down when a man like him can see anything in a gamekeeper's daughter, and not young, not at all young. Very handsome, I grant you, but eight or nine-and-twenty or more!"

The world did, indeed, seem to be turned upside down with Nellie. Mrs. Derwent was bad enough, in all conscience, but this was ten times worse.

"Give him a chance!" indeed. Never. She had done with him now, once for all.

She alighted from the stuffy brougham with a frightful headache—whether due to the atmosphere or the news, it was there; and excusing herself on this pretext spent all the evening in her room digesting Mrs. Monckton's piece of scandal.

If she could have taken anyone into her confidence she would have felt better, but such a proceeding was out of the question. She dare not divulge who she was—she must suffer alone.

It seemed to her that she was paying a heavy price for the restoration of her sight. Blind, she saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing. Now she had recovered the use of her eyes she saw only too much. She had seen and fallen in love—no use to blink the fact—with her own husband, and he was a heartless, treacherous, unprincipled wretch—and still she loved him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

MONCKTON GRANGE was crammed from roof to cellar! Lord Ravenhill and Mrs. Derwent, and Captain Monckton helped to fill it, and were among the liveliest and most popular guests.

The theatricals were over, and had been a signal success, Lord Ravenhill and Mrs. Derwent sharing the laurels between them. Lovers they had been on the stage—lovers they were off the stage, as far as appearances were any guide; and as for Nellie, she was flirting in the most open and barefaced manner with Captain Roland Montagu, who was her slave and her shadow.

Lord Ravenhill had evinced a great desire to be both on his first arrival, but he had been so unmercifully and so ruthlessly snubbed that he never ventured more than good-morning and good-night, and was quite on his high horse, and not inclined to dismount. This was Connie's opportunity, and she did not let it slip, you may be sure. Hugh was called upon to act with her, to ride with her, to fetch and carry, to hold her silks whilst she wound off skein after skein, under Nellie's very nose—it was all the same to Hugh who appropriated him, when the only one of the ladies he cared a button for ignored him, and treated him as he said to himself, "worse than a dog, by Jove—worse than a dog! I wish she would treat me half as well. She's always feeding and nursing, and kissing that horrid little pug—lucky old brute!"

Mrs. Derwent was a person of odd fancies and sudden caprices. She was fired with a desire to see Lord Ravenhill's family mansion, and on a bye-day a large party was got up to visit Ravenswood, under the auspices of its master. Most of the guests were to ride to explore the park, and, previous to lunch sumptuously, and to return in time for dinner.

Nellie declined to make one of the expedition—declined in vain. Her excuses were laughed at as barefaced and silly; and, in spite of herself, she had to give in, so as not to make herself remarkable, and visit the house where she was born as if she were an inquisitive stranger. Bude as she was, it was chiefly beside her that

Lord Ravenhill rode, and pointed out the different effects of scenery—she it was that he helped first from her horse, that he ushered first into the old familiar rooms, and to her he showed the grim old painting of "my wife's father."

He insisted on her occupying the head of the table, and she took it mechanically for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, much to the indignation and disgust of Connie, who had to content herself with a seat at the host's right hand. The party was merry, the luncheon superb, the champagne of the best; flowers from Covent Garden decked the table, which was loaded with old family plate. The whole house had been brightened up and metamorphosed since Nellie's time.

"Jolly old place! Awfully jolly house," said Captain Montagu, whose heart was merry with wine. "The only thing we want to make the entertainment complete is the presence of Lady Ravenhill."

An awkward silence ensued, and then a sudden buzz of conversation came from all sides to cover, if possible, the last unfortunate speech.

Lord Ravenhill glanced over at his *vis-à-vis*. She was white to the very lips. What ailed her? Was she going to faint? No, she was not. She was able to leave the table quite steadily and sedately, and follow the crowd round the gardens, stables, grounds, and finally to the old church.

"It only wants one thing, Hugh," said Connie, with a sigh of satisfaction—the place having far surpassed all her calculations and anticipations—"and that is a mistress," she added, in a soft voice.

"I'm afraid it is never likely to have that, so you must make the best of it as it is," said Hugh, brusquely, pushing open the heavy church door and removing his hat.

The sightsees spread all over the building, gazing at tombs, brasses and slabs; and Nellie, without knowing it, found herself standing at the foot of the communion rails.

"Here I was married," said a well-known voice beside her, "nearly four years ago." What would he have said if she had replied, "and to me!" but she merely mumbled something about the pretty new window of stained glass and the vivid colour of the sky.

"New window! How do you know it is new?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, I don't know!" she stammered, in confusion. "It looks quite recent, that is all."

"So it is. It was put up to the memory of the late Earl."

"By you?"

"Yes, of course. It was the least I could do, don't you think, when he provided me with a wife and a fortune?"

There was a ring of bitterness in this speech that did not escape Mrs. Hill, and she turned away and permitted Captain Montagu to show her all the old monuments of the Ravenhill family, and what is more, and worse, she encouraged him in a marked manner, and kept him by her side, not merely all the way home, but all the evening; and the more she remarked Hugh's looks of indignant expostulation and pained surprise the more she laughed and smiled and flirted.

The thought of Rose Walker at the Gate Lodge made her almost reckless, and she felt a downright wicked pleasure in astonishing and shocking her unprincipled husband.

If he only knew she was his wife, how furious he would be!

Not that she did anything actually wrong or out of the common—oh, dear no! She merely banked with Captain Montagu at cards and made saucy little rude remarks across the table to Lord Ravenhill. She had every confidence with her partner behind her large black fan.

She allowed him to sit beside her at tea, to stand beside her at the piano, to carry her cloak, to help her to mount her horse. Lord Ravenhill beholding all this was amazed, angry, and jealous.

The day of the hunt was propitious. There were hundreds on the lawn—on foot and on horseback, ladies and gentlemen—and if you were to single out the best-looking pair of

equestrians and give your vote impartially I am sure you would have said Lord Ravenhill for one, on his splendid black hunter, and the pretty girl in the brown habit for the other—viz., Mrs. Hill.

The meet was late—the hounds drew several covers blank, and had a rattling run later in the afternoon.

Nellie had ridden splendidly—desperately; indeed, she did not much care whether she broke her neck or not. Every time she thought of Rosie Waller, and that was pretty often, she dug her little sharp spur and went faster and faster.

Well for her that she was on a well-trained thoroughbred. Well for her she was a light weight, or she would have come to grief over some of those blind fences or hog-backed stiles.

The evening was drawing in ere the fox was run to ground, and as Nellie looked round she found herself in a totally strange country, miles from the Moncktons, on a tired horse, and with a cold drizzle coming on.

(To be continued.)

## FALSE OF FAITH.

—107—

(Continued from page 105.)

"Oh, gu," she said cheerfully. "I shall be quite safe here and you will not be far away," so after a little demur he left her, she watching his retreating figure through the trees and glimmering lights, thinking how brave and stalwart he was, how foolish she had been not to see him thus in the days gone by.

She was startled when somebody dropped into the chair beside her, and, rising hurriedly, glanced apprehensively around. The new comer grasping her hand, said in slow, low tones—

"Don't go, Lavender; I have something to say to you;" and with a sense of horror she saw he was Francis Allardyce.

"You can have nothing to say to me that I should wish to hear," she answered, wrenching herself free, "and I owe it to my husband not to be seen *tête-à-tête* with Sir Francis Allardyce."

"Your husband," he answered, "so you married Ray after all; I knew you would, although I, and I only, had your heart. It is like a woman to ruin a man's whole life because of an early folly—and you thought to find your model lover more placable than I. Have you done so? Are either he or you quite content with your bargain? Does he love his loveless wife just as well as when she was not his? Answer me, Lavender—I will speak now: you shall listen and reply."

She dropped into her chair, all white and trembling, her face averted, because this very plain questioning showed her all her heart's deep love, and made her fear that she had utterly lost what now she desired.

"If," she said very slowly, "if Felix holds me less dear than he used, the fault is mine, not his; he is the best and noblest, the most generous of men."

"But," answered Francis, "even the best, noblest, and most generous have their faults; you are both dissatisfied"—and here his voice altered, until it trembled with passion, "look at me, Lavender; did you ever see a fellow more changed, that accused shot has made a weak man of a strong one,—I am aged, I know—but still I am the first love of your life, and you are not a woman swift to forget—"

Her grave eyes met his, rested a moment on the wild beauty of his haggard face.

"I am sorry that you suffer," she said coldly, "but I am sorrier still for the woman you wronged—"

"Let her rest; surely she had her revenge. But you—oh, Lavender! oh, my heart's darling! come back to me; I have been so hungry for your love, so weary for the sight of you, the music of your voice—throw every other thought to the winds and come—"

"Sir Francis, your words disgrace yourself and me; you forget that I am a wife."



Again she rose, and as she stood there, a slender figure before him, she was wholly unaware of her husband's return; neither knew that wordless, breathless with rage, and the horrible dread that his Lavender, might be less pure and true than she had seemed, Felix was standing close by, listening to every word, noting every change on the sweet face under the light of the moon.

"I forgot nothing," Francis retorted fiercely. "I remember all your kind words, all your tender caresses. Tell me, if you dare, that I am nothing to you, or that you gave your heart with your hand when you married Felix Ray."

Oh how anxiously the other man awaited her reply; it came in a soft, dreamy tone; she was standing with her hands loosely folded, and her eyes a little raised.

"It is true that when I stood before the altar, it was affection only I gave my husband; but week by week, month by month, under the influence of his tender care that affection has grown and ripened into love. There is no man on earth I so honour, and if by my own coldness and folly I have estranged him, I can only pray that death may come to me soon. Looking back, I can but wonder that ever any other name than his was precious to me—"

"Lavender!"

The cry broke from Francis; the listener drew nearer yet, there was something almost like a sob in his throat; such bliss was surely not for him.

"If" the young wife went on, "if years of faithful love, of never failing service, can restore to me what once I so lightly prized, I shall count myself blessed; every morning, every night, I thank Heaven that it has granted me to know how good a man may be, and I pray that I may be made worthy him."

"Lavender! It is not true—oh, think of my need—do with me what you will, so that you do not send me away."

"Sir Francis," said a deep voice near, "I will ask you to remember this lady is my wife, and that from to-night all intercourse between you is ended, and there was Felix, very grim and stern, standing beside them.

Not knowing what he had heard, Lavender shrank a little from him, looking like the guilty thing she was not, and Felix went on,—

"But that you are so physically my inferior, I would make you pay ten times over the debt you owe me, the insult you to-night have offered Mrs. Ray; as it is, go free—but go at once, or I shall not hold my hand, and by Heaven! (with sudden passion) if you dare approach my wife again, I will crush the life out of your miserable body."

But his voice grew gentle as taking Lavender's trembling hand, he said—

"Come; it is growing cold, and this is no place for you," and so he led her away down the dim and verdant alleys until they stood alone under the moonlight sky. Then he spoke,—

"Did you mean what you said, my wife? Is it true that you have learned to love me?"

She burst into tears.

"Oh, yes, yes, with all my soul, with all my strength. I have tried you long and often, and it is said dead love does not revive, but if yours is dead at least let me hope that I may breathe new life into it—"

"True love can never die—Lavender—wife."

She lifted her eyes to his; what she saw there told her all the truth; with a sob she flung herself upon his breast. "My husband—and my love—" with the kiss she gave the last doubt vanished, the last cloud left their sky, and as his cheek touched hers, perhaps it was not wet with her tears alone.

At Downley, Jenny flourishes mightily as the buxom hostess of the Blue Boar, for she contrived to inveigle a harmless young carpenter into marriage, and whilst he labours at his bench, she entertains her guests right merrily.

Sir Francis resides abroad, and no children are born to him of his loveless marriage; but at Raycroft there is peace and happiness, for Lavender and Felix are lovers still, though three sturdy children have come to bless their union.

[THE END.]

## ALICE'S MISTAKE.

—101—

I HAD thought I loved him, had been very happy as his affianced bride, and whispered with a strange pride his name, remembering that some day it would be my own as well.

But mine was not the nature to brook control.

It was rather an early date, I thought, when an engagement was so new a thing, not quite three months' old, to be called to account for my actions.

And what had I done wrong?

My betrothed, Clarence Withers, had been absent for a week, and during his absence Will Maynard had been my escort wherever I had chanced to go.

I would not have my engagement announced, although it was currently suspected; there were many kind friends to whisper the fact of my so-called flirtation with Clarence upon his return.

And so my first meeting was not, alas, what I had painted it to myself.

When I went forward to meet him, glad, oh, so glad to see him home again, and ready to tell him so, if he needed telling other than the story he could read in my eyes and outstretched hands of welcome. He only took my hands in his and held me off rather than drew me to his heart, where my head had so often lain, and said in cold, strange tones, so unlike the loving words of welcome I was waiting for,—

"Alice, what is this I hear about my wife?"

"Your wife, Mr. Withers? During which of my sleeping moments have I been dignified to that title, or you aspired to the authority of a husband?"

"To me, Alice, a promise made is a promise kept, and from the day you gave yourself to me I have looked upon you as my wife as solemnly as though a priest had already blessed our union. You know full well my opinion of Mr. Maynard. He is a man I would not permit to cross my threshold; yet during my short absence he has been constantly and publicly by your side. In fact, has shown you attentions you had no right to receive."

"Mr. Maynard is a particular friend of mine," I exclaimed, with flashing eyes, slipping my hands from his clasp, "and permit me to say I will no longer listen to this harangue. No right to receive ordinary courteous attentions from a gentleman! You strangely forget the fact that you call yourself such when you dare address me thus. Good morning, Mr. Withers."

"Stay, Alice! If I spoke quickly, forgive me. But it was so hard to hear all this just as I arrived home, hungry for your welcome. You know, dear, there were so many aspirants for this little hand I sometimes can scarce believe in my own rare fortune. Are you not glad to see me, Alice?"

"Glad? No. When I was glad you sent all my happiness back into my own heart, and made your first words words of reproach and blame. I have done nothing to deserve either, and I would do the same again."

"Not if you knew it gave me pain."

"Yes; because you have no right to feel pain. If you have no trust in me, let us part."

"It is not a question of trust, my Alice. But come, be my own sweet girl again and promise me to announce our engagement, and thus put a stop to Mr. Maynard's useless devotion."

"No, Mr. Withers. I have seen enough to know that with such a nature as I have this morning learned yours to be I never could be happy. I will return you your letters and your gifts, and you will send me my letters and picture. Hereafter we meet simply as friends."

And so we parted.

He grew very pale when I said it was all over—white to the lips, with anger I suppose.

What a fiendish temper he must possess, and what an incorrigible tyrant of a husband he would have made!

Well, it is all over now, I thought.

I am very glad, although I wished the strange pain would go away from my heart, and could not think what had caused it.

It was two weeks since Clarence Withers and I had met and parted, and I did not see him until the night of Mrs. Struther's party.

He was looking—oh, so handsome—evidently not pining in secret, for, as usual, he was the life of the party, and devoted himself to that pretty Irene Brooks.

Well, I did not wear the willow either for that matter.

Mr. Maynard was very devoted, and my old friends rallied to my standard in all their force.

He asked me once to dance with him—a square dance—but I declined, and he looked indifferently relieved; and once when I was laughing and talking with Mr. Maynard, I felt his eye was on me, and threw additional *emphase* into the nothings I was saying.

Yet I was tired and bored. Why was it Mr. Maynard's society had ceased to attract me?

But yet it seemed so strange to meet everywhere; to exchange a smile of icy coldness and a courteous bow of formal greeting and feel that all was over.

I don't think I quite realised it until the day Mr. Maynard told me his engagement to Irene Brooks was a positive fact. I did not think he could have quite forgotten in three short months.

He always admired her I knew, and as she is meek and amiable, she is just suited to such a bear.

For my part, I hate married men and married life, and thought, with inward congratulations, of the many years ere I should take the fatal plunge.

But my congratulations vanished when I awoke, one morning, with the sudden consciousness that I had given, the night before, a favourable answer to Will Maynard's wooing.

I did not mean to say "Yes." I did not care for him when he was away from me; but he was so earnest, so determined, I scarcely knew I had consented until I felt his lips press mine and he had slipped a glittering stone upon my finger.

It was there as I awakened, so that I knew it was no dream. All day I caught its sparkle; all day it served as witness to my mad folly.

But when that night I entered Mrs. Somers's drawing-rooms, leaning on his arm, he looking down on me with a sort of possession look, I fancy, I caught Clarence Withers's eye, full of scorn and full of anger.

I think mine flashed back equal contempt. I am sure I felt it. Had he not first set me the example?

I was only following in his footsteps, carrying out his pet theory, that the man always should precede the woman and she bend to his lordly will.

At last the summer came. What a long, long winter it had been, and how glad I was to see once more the birds and flowers. I thought, as I wandered one lovely morning in June away from the gay party who were spending the day among the woods and trees, revelling in a picnic of the good old-fashioned sort.

I hate picnics and always did, and I was glad to have escaped them all. So I wandered on, stooping now and then to pluck a wild flower, or an exquisite fern, until, on the verge of a steep rock, my eye caught a bunch of lovely anemones. I sprang forward, eager to grasp it—too eager alas!—for my foot tripped and I fell forward upon the sharp stone, cutting an ugly gash in my forehead.

I think it stunned me for the moment. I must have fainted; but, surely, ere I opened my eyes I caught the sound of breathless tones exclaiming: "My God, my darling!" and felt hot kisses rain on cheek and lip.

Slowly I unclosed the sealed lids and gazed into the pallid face of Clarence Withers. My strength came back with my pride and, drawing myself away, I said,—

"Do not be alarmed, Mr. Withers, it is all

right now. Did you imagine you held Miss Brooks? Allow me to relieve you."

"No, Miss Brooks is fortunately in a place of safety. I am glad to see your accident was so trivial. Good morning."

And so he left me. Were those cold, indifferent tones the warm, loving ones I had listened to but a moment before? No. I had been dreaming; and, staunching the blood with my handkerchief which still flowed freely, I walked on, and soon stumbled upon Mr. Maynard hastening to find me.

Oh, how his words of pity and distress grated on my ear. I answered him petulantly, and begged to be taken home. My head ached. He ordered the carriage at once.

I would not allow him to accompany me, and with anxious solicitation he tenderly bade me good-by, closed the door upon me, and I was again alone.

All night I lay and tossed upon my bed, and morning found me feverish and restless, but with a new, undaunted resolution, that ere I slept again I should have returned Will Maynard's ring, and asked him to give me back my plighted troth.

Yet the words came with a hard struggle, and the tall-tale blood crimsoned my cheek and brow as I stood before him and acknowledged that I could not marry him.

"Do you not love me, Alice?" he said.

"No, Mr. Maynard. You have been very good, very kind, but I cannot love you."

"Why, then, did you consent to be my wife?"

His tones were calm now, with the calmness which precedes the mountain storm, when all nature is hushed, and not a leaflet stirs, not even a blade of grass trembles, until with a mighty roar heaven discharges its artillery, and the hills quake.

"Oh, do not ask me. I do not know. I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean that these few months have been a farce in which you and I were the chief actors? Who amongst your friends have been the audience to watch this poor puppet-show, in which your experienced hands have pulled the strings? Do not look indignant. You have no right to indignation. Have you never loved me?"

"Never, Mr. Maynard, as I should have loved you. You came to me at a time when my heart was hungry. Your words fascinated me, and I hoped and believed I would find the happiness I sought. Oh, forgive me! I know how wrong I have been. Indeed, you cannot be more sorry than am I, for you have not the added sting of remorse. Think of me as you will, but forgive the pain I have caused you and try to forget me."

But no forgiving glances answered my appeal. Fittingly and coldly the man spoke in cutting tones:

"I said we were the chief actors. Doubtless there has been a power behind the scenes. Perhaps Mr. Withers has regained ascendancy over your heart. Heart did I say? Excuse me, Miss Edith, I did not mean to do you such injustice as to mention what you do not possess. I wish Mr. Withers every joy."

"Stop! You are unjust, indeed—nay more—cruel, unmanly! Mr. Withers is no more to me than the wind that blows; less, indeed, for it brings refreshing air and fragrance from myriads of flowers. I hope never to see his face again, since his name has only brought me fresh insult, but he at least is a man, and would scorn to strike a woman to the core who pleaded to him for forgiveness. Go, Mr. Maynard. We are quits now. I trust in time I may forgive you."

It was over then—all over. And for my wicked folly I was punished. Even Clarence, I thought, with curling lip, would have been satisfied.

I trust his wooing with Miss Brooks was somewhat smoother than had been this of mine.

Why did I think of him? What cared I whether it was smooth or rough? Our paths lay widely apart. The world was broad enough for both.

Was it? Ah, tell-tale heart that beat with such strange, choking throbs, then stood still for a moment, whilst the blood receded from its channels, leaving me icy as death when they told me, two short weeks after, Clarence Withers was not expected to live.

He had been stricken with a fever then prevalent in our midst, and on account of which only that day I was to have gone into purer air. And now the physicians said there was no hope of his recovery. Ill, dying—Well, what did it matter to me? Did I not say the world was broad enough for both, and if our paths diverged so widely, what was death but the medium which severed them still further apart.

Ah, no! At last I knew he lived. At least I sometimes caught the music of his voice, the sunshine of his smile. But where was his betrothed? By his side? No; she had gone, too, leaving a kindly message. That was all. Surely she could not have been his promised wife, else she would have stayed. Oh, my poor heart! At last I knew the truth, and scarce knowing what I did I drew a sheet of paper toward me, and with blinding tears wrote:—

"Before you die, Clarence—before you leave me desolate—at least send me one little word—one token of forgiveness. My pride has all gone, dear. I know how wrong I was with you, but you will forgive me, will you not? And though in Heaven you must remember another as your betrothed, you will sometimes think lovingly, if we can think *there*, of ALICE."

There came no answer to my note, and when I heard Clarence Withers was not going to die, that hopes were entertained of his recovery, and slowly hope gave place to certainty, my first glad, immeasurable happiness was succeeded by agony of shame and by the breathless query: "What have I done? Oh, if I could bury myself anywhere so that I might never see his look of withering scorn! Oh, I wish I had died!" was my thought one afternoon a few weeks later as I sat alone, and burying my head in my hands the tears, which had for so long refused to come, burst forth in bitter, choking sobs. I had not heard a sound until a hand was laid upon my shoulder, a tender, pitying voice said:

"Poor little girl! Have you really grieved so, Alice?"

Springing to my feet, I confronted the man of whom I had been thinking; but even through my tears I saw how ill and worn he looked.

"Have you come to triumph over my weakness, Mr. Withers? I have suffered sufficiently, I can assure you, over my poor folly, without you adding to my misery. I wish, I wish that you had died!"

"Listen, Alice! Be calm, darling!" he said, as he drew me down in the old, tender, wilful way, which made his very mastery sweet. "I wanted to die, too, until, one day, a little, white-winged messenger of peace and hope came and nestled in my breast. I was too ill to answer it, but I kept it there; and when the fever raged its highest and I almost let go my hold of life, it whispered of the sweetness the future held for me. And so I battled on. And when I grew stronger and knew I should once again look into your eyes, I would not let impatience master me. I feared to trust my own great joy, and waited, darling, until, face to face, I could tell you this. All has been a mistake between us. No other woman has ever touched my heart. Irene and I were only friends, and I told her of my troubles in all that dreary time. Alice, have I found my wife at last?"

I could not answer, but he kissed away the tears, and I sobbed out my confession on his breast; but when I had finished he only drew me closer, whispering sweet words of glad, forgiving, love, while I was well content to lie nestled in the strong arms of "my bear."

CATHARINE DE MEDICI, Queen of France, wore the longest train on record. It was her bridal robe. The train was borne by twenty pages, and was forty-eight yards long.

## FACETIÆ.

WIGSBY: "What is the extreme penalty for bigamy?" BRIEFS: "Two mothers-in-law."

SHR: "Are your family castles very old possessions?" "Oh, yes; they are air-loom."

CREDITOR (angrily): "You ought to pay your way." DEBTOR (coolly): "It's not my way to pay."

HZ (indignantly): "I hope I know my own mind." SHE (sweetly): "Yes, you surely ought to know as much as that."

"HAVE you read my last poem?" asked the amateur versifier, and the weary critic answered involuntarily: "I hope so."

EDITH: "Do you know who was the prettiest girl at Mrs. Van Astor's reception?" Helen: "You embarrass me. Must I answer?"

CUSTOMER (in a restaurant): "Look here, waiter, I've found a button in this salad." WAITER: "That's all right, sir; it is a part of the dressing."

"YES, I have bought a piano for my daughter. She will give lessons and so help to keep the wolf from the door." "If the wolf is at all musical in his tastes."

SAR: "I can say this for our sewing club, I've never heard a word of gossip there yet." HE: "Well, you can't expect to as long as you all talk at once."

DINKS: "When a woman is in doubt as to whether she will take well in a photograph how is the question usually decided?" DANKS: "In the negative, you blockhead, in the negative."

CHOLLY: "I'd go west out on a wanche if I wasn't afraid those savages would bwin me." MISS SMARTLY: "Oh, I don't believe those Indian braves would do so small a thing as that."

EXAMINER: "Now, my lad, what providential phenomena have we to be thankful for in the turning of the earth on its own axis, when moving round the sun?" BOY: "That it don't get frizzled more on one side than the other."

THE HON. GEORGE STONEY (to dressmaker presenting bill): "Oh! ah, give it to my wife." Dressmaker: "But I can't get any money out of her." THE HON. G. S.: "Sympathise with you, my dear madam; neither can I."

COST NO ORISON.—The Antiquarian Book-seller: "Do you want to see any rare old first editions, sir?" MR. NUMONEY (emphatically): "No, indeed, I want the very latest editions you've got."

RALPH: "Suppose a fellow's best girl gets mad when he asks for a kiss?" CURTIS: "Take is without asking." RALPH: "Suppose she gets mad then?" CURTIS: "Then he's got some other fellow's girl."

JABBERS: "Confound it! This letter from my wife begins 'My ownest, deary hubby.'" HABBERS: "Why, what's wrong with that?" JABBERS: "That means that in the postscript I shall find a request for a cheque immediately."

FIRST LAUNDRESS: "Why is it that Mr. Simpson doesn't have his initials marked on his cuffs and collar, do you suppose?" SECOND LAUNDRESS: "It may be because his name is Alphonsio Spaulding Simpson, possibly."

"MR. BINKS (after an absence): "And so you shot a burglar while here and unprotected? You are a brave little woman. What became of him?" MRS. BINKS: "The other burglar carried him off." "Which other burglar?" "The one I aimed at."

"No," said the young woman, haughtily, in response to his request as they sat on the porch in the twilight. "I will not let you hold my hand. I don't believe in such conduct for a young lady. And besides," she added, after a pause, "it isn't dark enough yet."

"DON'T ask me how I enjoyed the evening!" exclaimed Miss Quickstep, angrily pulling off her gloves, with tears of mortification in her eyes. "I'll never go to a reception with Mr. Peduncle again, mamma. Never! His handshake is six months behind the fashion."



## SOCIETY.

THE new Tower Bridge will be opened some time next month by the Prince of Wales, accompanied by the Princess, on behalf of her Majesty the Queen.

THE Duchess of Fife recently sent to the Murrayfield Children's Home at Edinburgh, a picture of her daughter Lady Alexandra Duff as first member of the Children's League of Pity in Scotland.

THREE of Queen Victoria's daughters-in-law hold commissions, the Princess of Wales being an officer of the Danish army, while the Duchess of Saxe-Coburg is a Russian Lancer, and the Duchess of Connaught something in a Prussian regiment.

THE Queen's reception at Coburg was official, and of great ceremony, for the visit there to attend the Royal marriage was as Queen of England and Empress of India not as Countess of Balmoral. Among those who took part in the reception were her Majesty's two sons, the Prince of Wales and the reigning Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

THERE was only one toast at the Royal Wedding luncheon and that was the health of the bride and bridegroom, which was proposed by the Emperor William in a very gushing speech, in which he described them as "my very dearly beloved cousins," and he concluded by calling out in a voice which rang all through the Schloss, "Es soll leben, hoch!"—"May they live long, hurrah!"

THE new Imperial German House of Parliament, which has been built on the Königsplatz, Berlin, at a cost of about a million and a half sterling, is to be opened by the Emperor with great pomp and circumstance in the autumn; and it is considered certain that Prince Bismarck will also be present to witness the placing of this ornamental coping stone, so to speak, upon his great life-work. The building has taken ten years to construct, and now it is the most imposing thing of its kind in all Europe.

THE Prince of Wales is to dine at Lord Rosebery's "full-dress banquet" on Saturday, May 26th "to celebrate her Majesty's birthday." The Duke of York will dine either with Lord Rosebery or Lord Spencer, and the Duke of Connaught and the Duke of Cambridge are to be the guests of Mr. Campbell-Bannerman. The Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, and most of the members of the Royal Family who are then in London, will be present at the "reception" which Lord Rosebery is to give at the Foreign Office (by arrangement with Lord Kimberley), at which Lady Leonfield is to act as hostess.

THE birthday present which the Queen values more than any other ever given to her was presented to her at Claremont on Her Majesty's twenty-fifth birthday by the late Prince Consort; it is a miniature portrait of the Prince himself, taken in armour in accordance with a wish frequently expressed by Her Majesty, and is said by the Queen to give the Prince Consort's real expression more than any picture that she knew. With this same birthday present Her Majesty had presented to her a little picture of Angels, such as had been introduced into Prince Albert's fresco in the pavilion of Buckingham Palace Gardens.

THE marriage of the Princess Josephine of Belgium and Prince Charles of Hohenzollern will be celebrated at Brussels on the 22nd inst. The King of the Belgians, who has taken the whole of the arrangements into his own hands, has set apart two rooms at the Brussels Palace, the one for the civil and the other for the ecclesiastical ceremony. The great desire of the Belgian Court is to avoid as much pomp and fuss as possible, so the guests will be limited to the venerable Princess Dowager of Sigmaringen (the bride's grandmother), the Queen of Saxony, Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern (the bridegroom's father), the Crown Prince and Princess of Roumania, Prince Frederick of Hohenzollern, and the Duke and Duchess of Coburg. The King of Roumania is unable to attend on account of the Queen's health.

## STATISTICS.

A STATISTICIAN gives the number of newspapers in the world at eighty-three thousand.

RAILROADS in Holland are so carefully managed that the accidental deaths on them average only one a year for the entire country.

IN some weeks as many as 15,000,000 fowls reach London from poultry farms in France, Italy, Austria, and Russia.

IN 1794 the habitual users of the English language did not number more than 30,000,000; in 1892 their number was estimated at 105,000,000.

THE area of land assigned to potatoes in France is nearly equal to the combined potato areas of the United Kingdom and the United States.

## GEMS.

IT takes a lifetime to build a character; it only takes one moment to destroy one.

STRENGTH alone knows conflict; weakness is below even defeat, and is born vanquished.

EXACT justice is commonly more merciful in the long run than pity, for it tends to foster in men those stronger qualities which make them good citizens.

EMPLOYMENT so certainly produces cheerfulness, that I have known a man come home in high spirits from a funeral merely because he had the management of it.

AVARICE is generally the last passion of those lives in which the first part has been squandered in pleasure, and the second devoted to ambition. He that sinks under the fatigue of getting wealth builds his age with the milder business of saving it.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**SODA BISCUITS (Soft).—**Three quarters of a pound of flour, one dessertspoonful of butter, half teaspoon salt, half teaspoon baking soda, half teaspoon tartaric acid, sweet milk; rub the butter among the flour and the dry things, and make into rather a soft paste with as much milk as necessary; roll out a quarter of an inch thick, cut with a lid or round cutter, brush with egg and a little milk mixed, put on a floured oven shelf, and bake quickly; milk may be used entirely instead of the egg.

**GERMAN BISCUITS.**—Half pound of flour, quarter pound butter, quarter pound fine sugar, one egg, half teaspoon ground cinnamon. Rub the butter among the flour and sugar, add the cinnamon, beat up the egg, and make whole into a firm paste with it; knead till quite smooth (it should be kneaded well); roll out thinly, and cut with a round cutter; put the biscuits on a buttered oven shelf, and bake a pale yellow colour. When they cool a little spread one with jam and put another over it. Ice the biscuits with the following icing:—quarter pound icing sugar, mix this with a very little water (only a spoonful), it should be only moist; spread this over the top, and put a little pink sugar in the middle.

**BUTTER RINGS.**—Take a pint and a gill of sweet cream, one pound and a quarter good sweet butter and heat while stirring until the butter is melted and the milk about lukewarm. Then add, still stirring, four ounces (light weight) of yeast, the grated rind of a lemon, two eggs, and lastly, two pounds of best flour. Beat the batter over the fire until it leaves the sides of the vessel and gets stiff sufficiently to shape it into rings as large as a saucer. To do this you have first to transfer the batter to a floured baking board. Set the rings to rise on a piece of buttered paper, which place in your sheet-iron baking-pan. Just before baking brush the rings with a mixture of an egg beaten up and a tablespoonful each of cream and melted butter; then sprinkle with granulated sugar and cinnamon. The latter is optional. Bake in a slow oven.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

DUTCH country houses are decorated with legends.

IN France the only gift a *fiancée* is permitted to receive is flowers.

THE first hat makers who plied their trade in Britain were Spaniards, who came over in 1510.

INSTANCES of extreme old age are more common among those who exercise themselves with gardening than in any other employment.

THE present Sultan of Morocco is descended from an Irish girl who became a member of the then royal harem more than 100 years ago.

SEVERAL of the Chinese temples have a bell at the entrance, so that each devotee as he passes in may announce his arrival to the Deity.

THE Burmese believe that the onyx contains in it an evil spirit, which wakes at sunset and causes terror to the wearer disturbing sleep with terrible dreams.

DURING the social reign of Catherine de Medici the ladies never washed their faces. There was an idea that water injured the complexion, and the face was simply wiped over with a rag dipped in milk.

IT is a remarkable fact that coffee is found to be especially injurious to the human system the farther one travels north. Greenlanders have found it necessary to prohibit its use by the young.

FIFTY years ago the whole of the population of Jerusalem numbered less than eleven thousand. At the present time there are over fifteen thousand persons of Jewish descent, and about the same number of Gentiles.

PRIOR to 1825 all shoes made for women's wear were without heels, and after that date all heels of that class were of the concave pattern up to 1857. From the earliest dates in shoemaking down to 1840 women's shoes were "straights"—that is to say, they were made so as to be worn on either foot without inconvenience.

THE carrier pigeon, when travelling, never feeds. If the distance be long, it flies on without stopping to take nutriment, and at last arrives, thin, exhausted, and almost dying. If corn be presented to it, it refuses to eat, contenting itself with drinking a little water and then sleeping. Two or three hours later, it begins to eat with great moderation, and sleeps again immediately afterwards. If its flight has been very prolonged, the pigeon will proceed in this manner for 48 hours before recovering its normal mode of feeding.

A CURIOUS custom in Armenia is that of admitting a young man into a guild or corporation of artisans. On the completion of his son's apprenticeship, the father invites the master of the craft to a feast, and when the toast of the day is about to be given, the candidate runs to the middle of the room and falls upon his knees. Approaching him, his own master inquires if he is persuaded that he can conscientiously call himself a master workman, and upon receiving a reply in the affirmative, boxes the youth's ears three times, and from that moment the lad becomes entitled to have his name enrolled on the strength of the craft and to set up in business on his own account should he care to do so.

BEFORE the day of the useful book of fashion, women derived their knowledge of the fashions from dolls dressed in model costumes, which were sent from one country to another, more especially from Paris, which then as now, was the leading centre of the mode. This custom of exchanging fashion dolls commenced early in the fifteenth century, and prevailed for more than one hundred years, when wood-cuts and engravings were substituted, until toward the end of the eighteenth century coloured fashioned plates and illustrated almanacs made their appearance. Wealthy ladies used to send dolls to their friends at a distance, and, as the costumes were made by professional "cutters," exactly to the right shape and in the latest style, with due regard to details of materials and trimmings, the dressmakers had only to enlarge the measurements of them.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**AUSTIN.**—We have no record of the date.

**EDDY.**—Forms quite legal with two witnesses.

**ANGELA.**—All depends on the doctor's decision.

**L. M.**—Leap year occurs only once in four years.

**COCKNEY.**—Yes, Glasgow is now a county in itself.

**A. QUERRIET.**—We believe they are not related at all.

**Jess.**—You cannot learn how to dance from a book.

**L. W.**—The document must be prepared by a lawyer.

**HUGH DARRELL.**—The 11th of February, 1874, fell on a Wednesday.

**ZENO.**—It would be against our rule to give the recommendation.

**BETTY.**—Vivian, a Latin word, may be translated the loving one.

**CONSTANT READER.**—Marriage of an uncle to a niece is illegal and punishable.

**G. S.**—Godwin is German or Saxon, the man victorious in God.

**AN OLD READER.**—What was known as the "great comet" was seen in England in June, 1861.

**JOHN ANDERSON.**—A husband can bequeath all his property away from his wife.

**DOUBTFUL ONE.**—You can give your watch to whomsoever you think fit; the son has no claim.

**LUCK.**—The line, "Ships that pass in the night," &c., occurs in Longfellow's poem of "Elizabeth."

**SAM WELLES.**—It depends on the conditions on which the premises were taken.

**ANXIOUS MOTHER.**—The girl must have passed the sixth standard or be over thirteen years of age.

**G. G.**—If the young fellow's insanity is hereditary, he is not eligible for the army.

**A. R.**—The amount of indemnity paid by France to Germany at the close of the war was £200,000,000.

**ARCHIE H.**—There is a proper form, which you can get at a law stationer's with instructions.

**REGULAR READER.**—He is not obliged to pay another person for taking care of it.

**INDIGNANT TOM.**—A shopkeeper can positively refuse to take an article out of his window for a customer.

**VARY IGNORANT.**—The father of a family is called in Latin *paterfamilias*; the characters of a play *personae*.

**ARTHUR J.**—Your qualifications are those that are specially desired in one seeking the appointment you mention.

**WARRIOR FRANK.**—Have nothing more to say to a lender who asks a fee for inquiries; he means to keep your money.

**R. F. T.**—Letters intended for any member of Parliament, if sent to the House of Commons, would reach them in due course.

**LOTTIE.**—It would cost you as much to procure the proper materials for a small quantity as to buy it ready made in the shops.

**ANXIOUS TO KNOW.**—The mother is not obliged to find a home for a son who is able to work and will not. She can refuse him admission to the house.

**Q. R. S.**—It is legal to change a surname or to take an additional one. Notices by advertisement or circular addressed to persons likely to be concerned is enough.

**MARTIE.**—A domestic servant, while under notice, is bound to continue to do the usual housework, and to obey all lawful commands of an employer.

**ONE IN DOUBT.**—If it is a rule of the trade at which you are employed to give and get warning, then you can be sued for damages if you leave without notice.

**TREDDY O'FLYNN.**—Though you had a hundred guns you do not require a license for any as long as none is taken or used outside of your house.

**PAUL.**—You must, if possible, enter the service of an analytical chemist, and at some time attend the chemical classes in university in order to qualify.

**JOHN JAMES.**—Witnesses are required to marriage at a registrar's. As to the details asked for, apply at the superintendent registrar's office for the district.

**LAURA.**—Glycerine diluted with a little fresh lime or lemon juice will whiten and soften the skin, and has been successfully used for improving the complexion.

**HOOCHWIFE.**—We have known it washed clean with a sponge and slightly warm soap and water, followed by plain water and lightly rubbed with a soft linen cloth.

**GLADIE.**—Never be a stickler for all the rules of high social life, unless in company with those who are governed by the strictest conceptions of society etiquette.

**K. L. W.**—You must by inquiry find out the individual who acts as shore steward to the line or company you prefer; all the sea-going appointments are made through him.

**TROUBLED ONE.**—Keepers can be hired from neighbouring lunatic asylum, or if two doctors certify the man to be temporarily insane, he can thereupon be removed to the asylum till cured.

**ANGRY LANDLADY.**—If young gentleman does not intimate a week before he goes, that landlady can deal with apartments as she thinks fit after current week, he continues to be liable in rent while absent.

**FIVE YEARS' READER.**—We do not doubt that if you are able to produce letters from the guardian certifying that he is in a position to receive and maintain the child on arrival you will be allowed to take it with you.

**IGNORANT JACK.**—It is pronounced approximately like "Pay-eh-to," the first syllable being pronounced almost as short as "pe" in "pet" and the second syllable almost as short as "shu" in "shut."

**D. E. C.**—Excellent medical authority asserts that a sudden immersion of the body in cold water, soon after meals, is extremely dangerous. It chills the digestive organs, and arrests digestion.

**INQUISITIVE JOAN.**—Observant doctors have been taking measurements of the height of women in England, France and America, and announce that the English woman is the tallest, and the American next.

**MINNA.**—Strong sage tea is one of the very best applications for hair that seems in a weak and diseased condition. Mix with it a very little glycerine and rub well into the roots of the hair.

**H. O.**—A British subject married to his deceased wife's sister abroad continues to be married to her on his return, and their children are legitimate, but it is doubtful if they would succeed to their parents' property except under a will in their favour.

**P. F.**—Take an ordinary shod native (not Spanish) onion, cut it into little squares, put these in a pint bottle, fill up with best gin, let stand for twenty-four hours, then apply liquor with sponge to the scalp occasionally, rubbing it well in.

## OLD LETTERS.

Last night some yellow letters fell  
From out a scrip I found by chance;  
Among them was the silent ghost,  
The spirit of my first romance,  
And in a faint blue envelope  
A withered rose, long lost to dew,  
Bore witness to the dashing days  
When love was large and wits were few.

Yet, standing there all worn and gray,  
The tear drops quivered in my eyes,  
To think of youth's unshaken front,  
The forehead lifted to the skies.  
How rough a bill my eager feet  
Flung backward when upon its crest  
I saw the dotter of the lace  
The wind awoke on Helen's breast!

How thornless were the roses then,  
When fresh young eyes and lips were kind,  
When Cupid in our porches proved  
How true the tale that love is blind!  
But Red and White and poverty  
Would only make white where she May;  
Then came a bag of Golden Crowns,  
And jingled Red and White away.

Grown old and bignard of romance,  
I winced not much at night askew,  
And often ask my favourite cat  
What else had Red and White to do!  
And here's the bud that rose and sank,  
A crimson island, on her breast;  
Why should I burn it? Once again  
Slide rose and drama. God send me rest!

N. G.

**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—The translation of the Spanish word *carrasco* is "Past on it;" *chaparral*, a thicket or shrub oak; *corral*, an enclosure for horses, &c.; *hacienda*, a farm; *Alma mia*, "My dear;" *Senora*, Mrs. or Mistress; *Senorita*, Miss.

**MILLY.**—It is a good plan to put a little turpentine in the starch, then after it is ironed pass a damp rag lightly over the breast and apply a hot polishing iron. A polishing iron is round, and if you rub heavily it gives a beautiful gloss.

**AURELIA.**—We have known the loss of hair arrested and a fresh growth promoted by the occasional rubbing in of paraffin oil. Do not overdo it, and do not go near a candle at once after you have rubbed it in. Leave the hair as loose as possible for a few minutes and the small will quickly go off.

**K. P.**—Take fullest possible supply of clothes; any articles of furniture or plantain you value (such as blankets, cutlery or anything you have had in use) can also be taken; each emigrant is allowed about fifteen square feet of luggage free; over that the charge is usually about 1s. per square foot.

**HERBERT S.**—There is no liability whatever in the case except that the third wife's children must assist in maintaining their mother as soon as they are able to do so; meanwhile, the brothers and sisters of the first and second families are not in law bound to give a single penny towards the maintenance of either third wife or her children.

**ERIC G.**—Explosives take place from the stoppage of the pipes by frost or sediment, never, as has been thought, by the heating of the boiler red-hot and the subsequent admission of cold water, this last, contrary to common opinion, being accompanied by a reduction instead of an increase of pressure. The remedy is the provision of a proper safety-valve for every kitchen boiler.

**JULIAN.**—Faience, or fayence, is a kind of earthenware, a collective name for all the various kinds of glazed earthenware and porcelain. It takes its name from Faenza, in Italy, the original place of manufacture.

**COOKIE.**—To preserve eggs, to three gallons of water add one pint of lime and one and a half pints of salt. Put this brine in an earthen crock, and place in the cellar. Then put in the eggs. They will keep, it is said, one year.

**COLIN.**—The final extinction of the Jacobites, a party in Great Britain (so called from the Latin *Jacobus*, James), who, after the revolution of 1688 adhered to the cause of the dethroned King James II. and his descendants, may be dated from the death of Charles Edward in 1788.

**PETER.**—The word penny was originally used for money in general. Of all English coins the penny is the most ancient. It is said to have been first mentioned about the close of the seventh century, and was of silver deeply indented with a cross so as to be easily broken in two or four parts.

**PUZZLED HAL.**—Flowers, bonbons and books are the only admissible gifts between persons not engaged. Send the young lady a couple of dozen rosabuds or a bunch of carnations on her birthday. When you write her, send any book you may have read and liked. Expensive gifts are not in good taste under the circumstances.

**IRON.**—There are railroads in Japan. The first line was opened for traffic in 1872, and runs from Tokio to Yokohama. Surveying operations have been steadily going on for the construction of new roads, and in 1884 there were open for traffic 236 miles of railway. The Japanese are fast acquiring the progressiveness which characterises the Europeans and the inhabitants of the Western world.

**TOOTIE.**—An oval face is not necessary a beautiful one, nor a round face the reverse. There are beautiful round faces as well as beautiful oval ones, which will be found in statuary not strictly of the Grecian type. It is fortunate that we all differ on the subject of beauty. If there were only one standard, those not possessing it would be everlastingly bemoaning their fate.

**RACHEL.**—Finely powdered starch with an equal quantity of finely-crumbled stale bread mixed and rubbed on with pad formed of stale bread-crumbs cut from centre of the household loaf. Throw away the starch and crumbled bread as soon as it shows soil, and use fresh; rub with care and finish with flannel pad and bread-crumbs. Finally shake and brush with a perfectly clean brush.

**V. G. F.**—Vacancies do not often occur, and when they do, in large cities, there are always many applicants from among young men engaged in other professions with local knowledge, regular academic ability, and other qualifications; outsiders have thus small chance of success in applying; best plan is to try, in first place, to get engagement on country paper, and with experience gathered there work into town.

**POOR PLAIN PHYLLIS.**—It is not always the most beautiful woman who has the most admirers. Unless the possessor of beauty have other attractions she will fail to make the impression upon the circle in which she moves which ambitious persons so generally desire. If a plain young girl possess good conversational powers, if she be quick-witted, bright and animated, she will very often eclipse the one most noted for her physical charms.

**LENA.**—To clean feathers, cut some white ourd soap in small pieces, pour boiling water on them, and add a little pearlash; when the soap is quite dissolved, and the mixture cool enough for the hand to bear, plunge the feathers into it and draw them through the hand until all dirt is squeezed out of them; pass them through a clean lather with some blue in it, then rinse them in cold water with blue to give them a good colour; beat them against the hand to shake off the water, and dry by shaking them near a fire.

**VANDA.**—Take off the peel and put it in salt and water for a few hours, then put it in a jelly pan with water and sugar to taste it and boil till you can put the head of a pin easily into it, take it out and let it lie in water for a few hours, then boil one pound of sugar and one pint of water, put in the peel and boil for a quarter of an hour, pour it all out in a basin, pour the syrup in a pan and boil it up again and pour it over the peel; do this once more, boiling the peel in it for a quarter of an hour, take it out and let the peel dry in the sun or in a warm place.

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## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**ADMIN.**—We have no record of the date.  
**EDDY.**—Forms quite legal with two witnesses.  
**ANGELA.**—All depends on the doctor's decision.  
**L. M.**—Leap year occurs only once in four years.  
**COCKNEY.**—Yes, Glasgow is now a county in itself.  
**A. QUERRET.**—We believe they are not related at all.  
**Jess.**—You cannot learn how to dance from a book.  
**L. W.**—The document must be prepared by a lawyer.  
**HUGH DARELL.**—The 11th of February, 1874, fell on a Wednesday.

**Zeno.**—It would be against our rule to give the recommendation.

**BETTY.**—Virian, a Latin word, may be translated the loving one.

**CONSTANT READER.**—Marriage of an uncle to a niece is illegal and punishable.

**G. S.**—Godwin is German or Saxon, the man victorious in God.

**AN OLD READER.**—What was known as the "great comet" was seen in England in June, 1861.

**JOHN ANDERSON.**—A husband can bequeath all his property away from his wife.

**DOUBTFUL ONE.**—You can give your watch to whomsoever you think fit; the son has no claim.

**LOVE.**—The line, "Ships that pass in the night," &c., occurs in Longfellow's poem of "Elizabeth."

**SAM WILLEN.**—It depends on the conditions on which the premises were taken.

**ANXIOUS MOTHER.**—The girl must have passed the sixth standard or be over thirteen years of age.

**G. G.**—If the young fellow's insanity is hereditary, he is not eligible for the army.

**A. E.**—The amount of indemnity paid by France to Germany at the close of the war was £300,000,000.

**ARCHIE H.**—There is a proper form, which you can get at a law stationer's with instructions.

**REGULAR READER.**—He is not obliged to pay another person for taking care of it.

**INDIGNANT TOM.**—A shopkeeper can positively refuse to take an article out of his window for a customer.

**VERY IGNORANT.**—The father of a family is called in Latin *paterfamilias*; the characters of a play *divinus personæ*.

**ARTHUR J.**—Your qualifications are those that are specially desired in one seeking the appointment you mention.

**WOMBERG FRANK.**—Have nothing more to say to a lender who asks a fee for inquiries; he means to keep your money.

**E. F. T.**—Letters intended for any member of Parliament, if sent to the House of Commons, would reach them in due course.

**LOTTIE.**—It would cost you as much to procure the proper materials for a small quantity as to buy it ready made in the shops.

**ANXIOUS TO KNOW.**—The mother is not obliged to find a home for a son who is able to work and will not. She can refuse him admission to the house.

**Q. B. R.**—It is legal to change a surname or to take an additional one. Notice by advertisement or circular addressed to persons likely to be concerned is enough.

**MATTIE.**—A domestic servant, while under notice, is bound to continue to do the usual housework, and to obey all lawful commands of an employer.

**ONE IN DOUBT.**—If it is a rule of the trade at which you are employed to give and get warning, then you can be sued for damages if you leave without notice.

**TEDDY O'FLYNN.**—Though you had one hundred guineas you do not require a license for any as long as none is taken or used outside of your house.

**PHIL.**—You must, if possible, enter the service of an analytical chemist, and at same time attend the chemical classes in university in order to qualify.

**JOHN JAMES.**—Witnesses are required to marriage at a registrar's. As to the details asked for, apply at the superintendent registrar's office for the district.

**LADRA.**—Glycerine diluted with a little fresh lime or lemon juice will whiten and soften the skin, and has been successfully used for improving the complexion.

**HOCKWIFE.**—We have known it washed clean with a sponge and slightly warm soap and water, followed by plain water and lightly rubbed with a soft linen cloth.

**GLADYS.**—Never be a stickler for all the rules of high social life, unless in company with those who are governed by the strictest conceptions of society etiquette.

**K. L. W.**—You must by inquiry find out the individual who acts as shore steward to the line or company you prefer; all the sea-going appointments are made through him.

**TROUBLED ONE.**—Keepers can be hired from neighbouring lunatic asylums, or if two doctors certify the man to be temporarily insane, he can thereupon be removed to the asylum till cured.

**AGONY LANDLADY.**—If young gentleman does not intimate a week before he goes, that landlady can deal with apartments as she thinks fit after current week, he continues to be liable in rent while absent.

**FIVE YEARS' READER.**—We do not doubt that if you are able to produce letters from the guardian certifying that he is in a position to receive and maintain the child on arrival you will be allowed to take it with you.

**IGNORANT JACK.**—It is pronounced approximately like "Pay-sho-to," the first syllable being pronounced almost as short as "pe" in "pet" and the second syllable almost as short as "shu" in "shut."

**D. E. C.**—Eminent medical authority asserts that a sudden immersion of the body in cold water, soon after meals, is extremely dangerous. It chills the digestive organs, and arrests digestion.

**INQUISITIVE JOAN.**—Observant doctors have been taking measurements of the height of women in England, France and America, and announce that the English woman is the tallest, and the American next.

**MIMMA.**—Strong sage tea is one of the very best applications for hair that seems in a weak and diseased condition. Mix with it a very little glycerine and rub well into the roots of the hair.

**H. O.**—A British subject married to his deceased wife's sister abroad continues to be married to her on his return, and their children are legitimate, but it is doubtful if they would succeed to their parents' property except under a will in their favour.

**F. E.**—Take an ordinary sized native (not Spanish) onion, cut it into little squares, put these in a pint bottle, fill up with best gin, let stand for twenty-four hours, then apply liquor with sponge to the scalp occasionally, rubbing it well in.

## OLD LETTERS.

LAST night some yellow letters fell  
 From out a scrip I found by chance;  
 Among them was the attent ghost,  
 The spirit of my first romance,  
 And in a faint blue envelope  
 A withered rose, long lost to dew,  
 Bore witness to the dashing days  
 When love was large and wits were few.

Yet, standing there all worn and gray,  
 The tear drops quivered in my eyes,  
 To think of youth's unshaken front,  
 The forehead lifted to the skies.  
 How rough a bill my eager feet  
 Flung backward when upon its crest  
 I saw the flutter of the lace  
 The wind awoke on Helen's breast!

How thornless were the roses then,  
 When fresh young eyes and lips were kind,  
 When Cupid in our porches proved  
 How true the tale that love is blind!  
 But Red-and-White and poverty  
 Would only make while shone the May;  
 Then came a bag of Golden Crowns,  
 And jingled Red-and-White away.

Grown old and niggard of romance,  
 I wince not much at sighs and woe,  
 And often ask my favourite cat  
 What she had Red-and-White to do?  
 And here's the bud that rose and sank,  
 A crimson island, on her breast;  
 Why should I burn it? Once again  
 Hide rose and dream. God send me rest!

N. G.

**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—The translation of the Spanish word *carruaje* is "Post on it;" *chapelreal*, a thickset or shrub oak; *cerual*, an enclosure for horses, &c.; *Acenciada*, a farm; *Alma vie*, "My dear;" *Senora*, Mrs. or Mistress; *Senorita*, Miss.

**MILLY.**—It is a good plan to put a little turpentine in the starch, then after it is ironed pass a damp rag lightly over the board and apply a hot polishing iron. A polishing iron is round, and if you rub heavily it gives a beautiful gloss.

**AURILLA.**—We have known the loss of hair arrested and a fresh growth promoted by the occasional rubbing in of paraffin oil. Do not overdo it, and do not go near a candle at once after you have rubbed it in. Leave the hair as loose as possible for a few minutes and the smell will quickly go off.

**K. F.**—Take fullest possible supply of clothes; any articles of furniture or plumbing you value (such as blankets, cutlery or anything you have had in use) can also be taken; each emigrant is allowed about fifteen square feet of luggage free; over that the charge is usually about 1s. per square foot.

**HERBERT E.**—There is no liability whatever in the case except that the third wife's children must assist in maintaining their mother as soon as they are able to do so; meanwhile, the brothers and sisters of the first and second families are not in law bound to give a single penny towards the maintenance of either third wife or her children.

**ERIC C.**—Explosions take place from the stoppage of the pipes by frost or sediment, never, as has been thought, by the heating of the boiler red-hot and the subsequent admission of cold water, this last, contrary to common opinion, being accompanied by a reduction instead of an increase of pressure. The remedy is the provision of a proper safety-valve for every kitchen boiler.

**JULIAN.**—*Falience*, or *fayence*, is a kind of earthenware, a collective name for all the various kinds of glazed earthenware and porcelain. It takes its name from Faenza, in Italy, the original place of manufacture.

**COOKIE.**—To preserve eggs, to three gallons of water add one pint of lime and one and a half pints of salt. Put this brine in an earthen crock, and place in the cellar. Then put in the eggs. They will keep, it is said, one year.

**COLIN.**—The final extinction of the Jacobites, a party in Great Britain (so called from the Latin *Jacobus*, James), who, after the revolution of 1688 adhered to the cause of the deposed King James II. and his descendants, may be dated from the death of Charles Edward in 1788.

**PETER.**—The word penny was originally used for money in general. Of all English coins the penny is the most ancient. It is said to have been first mentioned about the close of the seventh century, and was of silver deeply indented with a cross so as to be easily broken in two or four parts.

**PURPLED HAIL.**—Flowers, bonbons and books are the only admissible gifts between persons not engaged. Send the young lady a couple of dozen rosebuds or a bunch of carnations on her birthday. When you write her, send any book you may have read and liked. Expensive gifts are not in good taste under the circumstances.

**ROM.**—There are railroads in Japan. The first line was opened for traffic in 1873, and runs from Tokio to Yokohama. Surveying operations have been steadily going on for the construction of new roads, and in 1884 there were open for traffic 328 miles of railway. The Japanese are fast acquiring the progressiveness which characterises the Europeans and the inhabitants of the Western world.

**TOOTHIE.**—An oval face is not necessarily a beautiful one, nor a round face the reverse. There are beautiful round faces as well as beautiful oval ones, which will be found in statuary not strictly of the Grecian type. It is fortunate that we all differ on the subject of beauty. If there were only one standard, those not possessing it would be everlastingly bemoaning their fate.

**RACHEL.**—Finely powdered starch with an equal quantity of finely-crumbed stale bread mixed and rubbed on with pad formed of stale bread-crumbs cut from centre of the household loaf. Throw away the starch and crumbed bread as soon as it shows soil, and use fresh; rub with care and finish with flannel pad and bread-crumbs. Finally shake and brush with a perfectly clean brush.

**V. O. F.**—Vacancies do not often occur, and when they do, in large cities, there are always many applicants from among young men engaged in other professions with local knowledge, requisite scholastic ability, and other qualifications; outsiders have thus small chance of success in applying; best plan is to try, in first place, to get engagement on country paper, and with experience gathered there work into town.

**POOR PLAIN PHYLLIS.**—It is not always the most beautiful woman who has the most admirers. Unless the possessor of beauty have other attractions she will fail to make the impression upon the circle in which she moves which ambitious persons so generally desire. If a plain young girl possesses good conversational powers, if she be quick-witted, bright and animated, she will very often eclipse the one most noted for her physical charms.

**LINA.**—To clean feathers, cut some white card soap in small pieces, pour boiling water on them, and add a little pearlash; when the soap is quite dissolved, add the mixture cool enough for the hand to bear, plunge the feathers into it and draw them through the hand until all dirt is squeezed out of them; pass them through a clean lather with some blue in it, then rinse them in cold water with blue to give them a good colour; beat them against the hand to shake off the water, and dry by shaking them near a fire.

**VANDA.**—Take off the peel and put it in salt and water for a few hours, then put it in a jelly pan with water and a sugar to taste it and boil till you can put the head of a pin easily into it, take it out and let it lie in water for a few hours, then boil one pound of sugar and one pint of water, put in the peel and boil for a quarter of an hour, pour it all out in a basin, pour the syrup in a pan and boil it up again and pour it over the peel; do this once more, boiling the peel in it for a quarter of an hour, take it out and let the peel dry in the sun or in a warm place.

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PART 394. VOL. LXIII.—JULY, 1894.

**CONTENTS.**

**SERIAL STORIES.**

	PAGE
HIS TRUE WORTH ... ..	133, 157, 181, 201
LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET ... ..	136, 160, 184, 197
TWO GIRLS ... ..	129, 153, 177
UNDER A CLOUD ... ..	193

**NOVELETTES.**

A SOLEMN CHARGE ... ..	169
LESBIA'S QUEST ... ..	121
ROSALIE'S PENANCE ... ..	205
THE BURTHEN OF HER LIFE ... ..	145

**SHORT STORY.**

	PAGE
A FEATHER FAN ... ..	213

**VARIETIES.**

POETRY ... ..	144, 163, 192, 216
FACETIE ... ..	142, 166, 190, 214
SOCIETY ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
STATISTICS ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
GEMS ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
HOUSEHOLD TREASURES ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
MISCELLANEOUS ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS ..	144, 163, 192, 216

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**CONTENTS.**

**SERIAL STORIES.**

	PAGE
HIS TRUE WORTH ... ..	133, 157, 181, 201
LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET ... ..	136, 160, 184, 197
TWO GIRLS ... ..	129, 153, 177
UNDER A CLOUD ... ..	193

**NOVELETTES.**

A SOLEMN CHARGE ... ..	169
LESBIA'S QUEST ... ..	121
ROSALIE'S PENANCE ... ..	205
THE BURTHEN OF HER LIFE ... ..	145

**SHORT STORY.**

	PAGE
A FEATHER FAN ... ..	213

**VARIETIES.**

POETRY ... ..	144, 168, 192, 216
FACETIÆ ... ..	142, 166, 190, 214
SOCIETY ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
STATISTICS ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
GEMS ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
HOUSEHOLD TREASURES ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
MISCELLANEOUS ... ..	143, 167, 191, 215
NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS ... ..	144, 168, 192, 216

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